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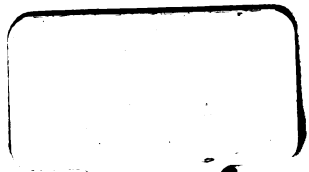
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THE HONEYMOON

BY ARNOLD BENNETT

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GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

THE HONEYMOON

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

Author of "The Old Wives' Tale," "Polite Farcies,"
"How to Live on Twenty-four Hours a Day"

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CEDRIC HASLAM

CHARLES HASLAM

MR. REACH HASLAM

THE BISHOP OF COLCHESTER

MR. FRAMPINGTON

CUTHBERT

GASTON

FLORA LLOYD

MRS. REACH HASLAM

NOTES ON CHARACTERS IN ACT I

FLORA LLOYD. Beautiful. Elegant. Charming. All in the highest degree possible. The whole play turns on these qualities in her.

CEDRIC HASLAM. Renowned aviator. The taciturn inventive Englishman. Very self-controlled, but capable of passionate moments. Obstinate, with enormous force of character. His movements, gestures, and speech have a certain air of slow indolence, but are at the same time marked by that masculine harshness and brusqueness which would specially appeal to a woman like Flora. No one could guess from his demeanour that he is famous.

CHARLES HASLAM. Boyish. Impulsive. Very self-centred. But very agreeable.

MRS. REACH HASLAM. Majestic. Richly dressed. The foremost woman-novelist in England and America. Her name a household word. No sense of humour. But she is very, very far from being a fool, and the part is not a low-comedy part. This play shows the least sympathetic side of her.

MR. REACH HASLAM. The husband of a celebrity. Strong sense of sardonic humour, which has very little outlet. Always exceedingly polite and even deferential to his wife, yet preserving his own dignity. A prim, dry, precise man.

GASTON. There are scores of Gastons in the hotels and restaurants of the West End. He does not differ from the type.

THE HONEYMOON

ACT I

SCENE.— *A sitting-room in the only hotel at a small seaside resort in Essex. Old-fashioned Victorian furniture, producing a picturesque general effect. Some modern touch, such as a framed coloured advertisement of pneumatic tyres. Door, R., leading to hall, principal entrance, and kitchen. Door, L., leading through a porch to the garden. A large window, divided into three portions by stonework, at the back: the panes are small; one of these portions is open, the others are closed. Through the window can be seen a view of the garden, and the sea in the distance. The fireplace is not seen. Cedric and Flora are seated at either side of a tea-table.*

TIME.— *Afternoon in June. Sunshine.*

Flora. Another cup? [Cedric, looking at her, makes no reply.] Cedric! Another cup? [with a touch of very good-humoured impatience. Cedric rises, goes round the table to her, takes hold of her, and kisses her.]

Cedric [*standing over her, she looking up at him*]. I've been wanting to do that for about thirty solid minutes.

Flora. Then why didn't you, my poor boy? [*Cedric gives a gesture to show that he doesn't know why*] . . . Instead of keeping us both waiting like that! [*Reflective.*] And yet it's barely three hours since you kissed me in the vestry!

Cedric. Vestry be dashed! And here's another thing I've been wanting to do [*he carefully kisses her ear*].

Flora. My ear!

Cedric. Precisely, your ear! Strange! . . . And I can tell you something even stranger. Shall I? [*She nods.*] When I'm standing over you I feel as if I should like to kill you! Yes, really, Fluff! It takes me all of a sudden! You know — when you lean out of a high balcony and you feel you must jump — well, it's that sort of a feeling.

Flora. What particular *kind* of homicide?

Cedric. Oh! [*at a loss*] a kind of a fierce crushing. [*She smiles.*] You think it's justifiable?

Flora. I don't mind so long as I know my risks.

Cedric [*after staring at her with a convinced air*]. We shall get on together all right!

Flora. Yes, I think we're doing rather well so far, considering [*turning the ring on his finger*].

Cedric. Considering what?

Flora. Considering how nervous we both are, naturally [*drops his hand*].

Cedric [*moving away. Half to himself*]. Yes, and we shall keep getting more nervous!

Flora [*resuming exactly the same matter-of-fact tone as when she first put the question*]. Another cup?

Cedric [*similar tone*]. How many have I had?

Flora. I don't know, dear.

Cedric. I've had enough, then.

Flora. Well, about our programme. Suppose we settle it a bit.

Cedric. Yes, let's. [*Sits down.*]

Flora. I do think it was a lovely idea to start off without any programme at all! Heaven itself couldn't say where we shan't be this time next week!

Cedric. Well, subject to your approval, I don't mind informing heaven that anyhow we shan't be here.

Flora. Tired of this place — already?

Cedric. On the contrary! But it's too small to hold a couple that have just walked out of a vestry. One hotel, one flagstaff, one boat, one sea. No pier, no tea-shop, no concert, and very probably no moon.

Flora. Extraordinary how even three hours of married life will change a man! You always used to be rather keen on quietness, solitude, old flannel suits, and so on.

Cedric. Now look here, Fluff! This honey-

moon programme is important. Er — [*hesitates*].

Flora [*nods*]. Let's talk as man to man.

Cedric. The fact is I've always had a very distinct theory about honeymoons. Far from the madding crowd is a mistake on a honeymoon. . . . Solitude! Wherever you are, if you're on a honeymoon, you'll get quite as much solitude as is good for you every twenty-four hours. Constant change and distraction — that's what wants arranging for. Solitude will arrange itself.

Flora. I didn't expect this from you, dear!

Cedric [*hastily, apologetic*]. Simply a theory! I've had no practical experience, and I'm perfectly ready to sit at your feet in the matter. Honestly, I don't care a straw. I may be wrong, and if you —

Flora [*solemnly*]. You aren't wrong! You're quite fearfully right!

Cedric [*after staring at her with a convinced air*]. We *shall* get on together — that's a bed-rock certainty! Now this place ought to be excellent for a beginning, but I should imagine that about a couple of days of it would do us.

Flora. I never suspected — no, really, I never *did* suspect — that any man could have as much common-sense, *beforehand*, as you have, Cedric. Not to speak of courage!

Cedric. Cheek, you mean. But then, of course. I *am* supposed to have a bit of nerve. Well, that's settled. We are to travel, then.

Flora. The point is, where?

Cedric. Where would you like?

Flora [*radiantly*]. Anywhere.

Cedric. What about Paris?

Flora. Oh, not Paris.

Cedric. Why not?

Flora. We should be simply mobbed. My dearest boy, have you ever heard speak of the simplicity of genius?

Cedric. I seem to have read about it somewhere, perhaps in the ladies' papers.

Flora. Well, you won't understand it, because you've got it — acutely.

Cedric. And here all these years I've been taking myself for rather a crafty person!

Flora. Do you know how many times I've counted your portrait in the weeklies this year? One hundred and forty-six! And that's not reckoning pictures where your aeroplane's so high up that you only look like a fly in a mouse-trap.

Cedric. In my simple mind I'd always thought that the surest way never to be recognised in the street was to have your portrait in the papers.

Flora. And then there's your likeness to your mother! A hundred and fifty-one thousand copies of your dear mother's last novel sold up to yesterday — so I saw in the "Telegraph." And then her new novel out to-day!

Cedric. I'm not suggesting that we should

camp out in Piccadilly for our honeymoon, my dove and my love; I said Paris.

Flora. All London will be in Paris.

Cedric. What.— next week?

Flora. Every week. Excuse me asking a pointed question, dearest, but have you ever been to Paris — I mean, since the flood?

Cedric. Yes. My knowledge of the unwieldy goods department of the big railway stations is probably matchless.

Flora. Well, if you'd stepped outside the stations you'd know that Paris is now exclusively inhabited by nice respectable people from London and nice respectable people from Arizona; and when they aren't cricking their necks to look at aeroplanes, they're improving their minds with your dear mother's latest novel.

Cedric [*mock serious*]. Will you believe me — I'd no notion of this at all!

Flora. I tell you what — I wouldn't mind going to Paris under an assumed name.

Cedric. Oh, no!

Flora. Why not? It would be amusing.

Cedric. I don't see myself travelling under a false name. I suppose I am too English.

Flora. Well, I don't see myself in a Paris hotel as the bride of the most celebrated English aviator, and the daughter-in-law of the most celebrated English lady-novelist. I do not! [*With a char-*

acteristic gesture.] Mobbed isn't the word for what we should be.

Cedric [*gazing at her*]. You must have noticed that I'm not what you'd call gushing. I've known myself go for a month without using a single superlative; but really, my most dear girl, my Fluffiest, when you strike an attitude like that, you're more marvellously and ineffably adorable than ever. Your beauty, your charm, your enormous slap-upness — [*changing his tone*] — Well, ecstasy is not my line . . . I only said Paris because the mater asked me if I thought we should be going there, and I told her it was possible.

Flora. Will *she* be there?

Cedric. No, no! Only, if we *should* happen to go there, she wanted me to count the panes of glass in a lamp-post on the Alexander III. bridge. One of her realistic details, you know. I expect she's got her hero staring absently up at that lamp-post — after an indiscreet evening. . . . She may be depending on me.

Flora. But surely that isn't a reason why we should go to Paris! Your dear mother might have wanted to know the number of ribs in the umbrella of the King of Siam — should we have had to book to Bangkok?

Cedric. I was only ——

Flora. Husband, I must tell you something about your mother. I've kept it a secret from

you. Do you know what made her give up her terrific scheme of our being married in the cathedral by the Bishop, surrounded by the press of Europe?

Cedric. I thought our angel-tongues persuaded her out of it.

Flora. Not at all. A threat did it. I dropped in on her one day for a little private chat while you were at Blackpool. She was just going to arrange with the Bishop. I told her confidentially — but of course *nicely* — that if she wouldn't agree to us being married by a curate at Colchester, with nobody but her and your father and Charlie present, and nothing whatever in the papers for at least a fortnight, then I should insist on being married at a registry office.

Cedric. The deuce you did! What did she say?

Flora. She merely said: "Of course your wish is our law, Mrs. Lloyd." But the next day she was calling me "Flora" again.

Cedric. The mater folded up like that?

Flora. There! [*Laughing.*] Listen to your own tone, dearest. Naturally she folded up. She only needs proper treatment.

Cedric. Well, I had a bit of a stir with her when I decided to give up my amateur status; but I must say as a rule I get on very well with the mater.

Flora. So do I. It's because I get on so well with her that we had a curate to-day instead of

the Bishop. Rather a jolly curate, didn't you think?

Cedric. Struck me as a queer lot.

Flora. Of course they're all queer. I liked him because when he asked me to sign my name he didn't say [*imitating the snigger of a curate*] "for the last time." They always do, you know. It's almost part of the service, for them. And if he had said it, I do believe I should have screamed.

Cedric. I say, Fluff, why after hiding this secret for several weeks — it's practically a double life that you've been leading — why do you reveal it just at this particular moment?

Flora. Oh — sheer caprice, my dearest! It just popped into my head.

CEDRIC [*somewhat troubled and awkward*]. So your notion is that the mater's moral empire over her family and the British public might be checked without grave loss of life, eh?

Flora. Cedric! [*Cedric looks at her, arrested and questioning.*] What's the rarest thing in the world? Quick?

Cedric. Common-sense, of course.

Flora. Oh! Good! I was afraid you might say a well-cooked potato.

Cedric. You ought to know me better than that.

Flora. But, Cedric, it's only now that we're beginning to make each other's acquaintance.

Cedric. That's true! But how did *you* know that common-sense is the rarest thing in the world?

Flora. Because I've got so very little of it myself. But even a very little will go a long way. Now, have I told you that our marriage isn't going to be like ordinary marriages — I mean, really?

Cedric. Well, you haven't exactly told me, but you've allowed me to suspect the fact.

Flora. Most marriages, and especially most honeymoons, are third-rate simply because the people concerned in them don't bring their bit of common-sense to bear on the problems that are [*mock platform manner*] — er — continually arising. [*Laughing.*] I intend to keep my bit of common-sense healthy by constant exercise. Common-sense, steadily applied, will solve any problem.

Cedric [*emphatically*]. Any! [*After a pause.*] Always provided —

Flora [*surprised*]. Always provided?

Cedric. My dear, in this outpouring of wisdom I, too, must have my share. Common-sense will solve any problem — any! — always provided it is employed simultaneously with politeness. During a long and varied career as a bachelor, dear spouse [*mock platform manner*], I have noticed that marriage is usually the death of politeness between a man and a woman. I have noticed that the stronger the passion the weaker the manners. Now, my theory is that politeness, instead of decreasing with intimacy — should increase! And when I say "politeness" I mean common, superficial politeness. I don't mean the deep-down sort

of thing that you can only detect with a divining-rod. . . . Pardon, you were saying?

Flora. Cedric! [*Impulsively rushes to him and kisses him.*] How *right* you are! It's exactly what I've been thinking for years. Now, as to common-sense and the programme. It would be against common-sense for us to begin by annoying your mother. If you really do think your mother would be in the least upset by our not going to Paris, naturally I shall be delighted to go. We could stop just long enough to inspect the lamp-post — and then off again.

Cedric. Oh, no! Oh, no! Of course she won't be upset!

Flora. That's settled, then. Do you know I've had the tiniest idea of going to Ostend, and then taking the Orient express to Buda-Pesth? I'm dying to see Hungary, simply dying.

Cedric. My dearest, your life shall be saved regardless of cost.

Flora. I do want an expensive honeymoon. Not because I'm extravagant, but because a honeymoon is a solemn, important thing.

Cedric. A symbol.

Flora. A symbol. And it ought to be done — well, adequately.

Cedric. Nineteen thousand pounds odd of mine is now on deposit at my bank — all honestly taken by me out of the pockets of ratepayers of various important towns in less than a year. And when

that's gone I can always get more at about the same rate, as you know.

Flora. Cedric! There is to be no flying during our honeymoon?

Cedric. Certainly not!

Flora. And it is to last a full month, naturally.

Cedric. A full calendar month — with no address for letters.

Flora [*sigh of ecstatic anticipation*]. Two or three days, you said, here?

Cedric. Yes, don't you think it's enough?

Flora. Oh! quite. We shall be gone before anybody's had time to guess — [*breaking off*]. Dearest, don't you think we came into the hotel rather well?

Cedric. Fine. No one could suspect that we hadn't been *born* married. I was proud of both of us. [*Enter Gaston, R.*]

Gaston. Shall I clear the table? [*Beginning to do so before receiving permission.*]

Flora. Yes. [*Flora and Cedric rise.*]

Gaston [*with a cheerful air, quite unconscious of his impudent manner*]. I suppose you stay here long time?

Flora [*determined to snub the waiter*]. Really!

Cedric. Why?

Gaston. Oh! honeymoon. Dull place. Fresh married English people demand generally dull place. [*Flora collapses and exit hurriedly into the garden, L.* *Cedric, with more leisurely dignity,*

lights a cigarette and is about to follow her when he stops and turns.]

Cedric. By the way, I don't think we *shall* stay long.

Gaston [*after looking at Flora in the garden, impartially and cheerfully*]. It is strange how English people have shame of being married. One would say it was a crime in England. A young man and young lady in English hotel — they like better that one should think they not married. It is different in Switzerland. In Switzerland we are proud. We tell all the world. Why not?

Cedric. So you come from Switzerland?

Gaston. Oh, yes. I am not English [*eagerly*].

Geneva. My father is a *fabricant*, a ——

Cedric. Manufacturer.

Gaston. Yes, manufacturer of door-mats. My father makes door-mats for all the hotels in Switzerland. Very big! Very important! He says — I must go into the hotel business. He will buy me a hotel. I learn everything. We do that in Switzerland. We are *scientifique*. I have been in the kitchens. Now I am waiter. No shame. Nobody could guess I am a gentleman.

Cedric. You mustn't be too hard on yourself, my friend. And so you've come to England?

Gaston. My father says, Go to England. Study the English *caractère* in England. Very valuable. When I come to London I could not speak English — no!

Cedric. When was that? Last week?

Gaston. No. It is a year, nearly. But I had at once a situation, the first day, at the Grand Babylon Hotel.

Cedric. Rather awkward, wasn't it, not knowing English?

Gaston. Yes. That fatigues one — to hear a strange language all the day.

Cedric. I meant for the customers.

Gaston [*nonchalant gesture*]. They are now well habituated. Many of them learn French or German, it saves time. English people are so practical. They are not *logique*, but they are practical. Now to-day I speak German, Italian, as perfectly as English.

Cedric. Remarkable! But surely a man of your enormous ability is wasted in a sleepy place like this. . . . Perhaps you find it amusing, though.

Gaston [*shakes his head. Passionately*]. Dull! It is for my health that I am here. Sleepy! Ah, my God! [*Disdainfully*.] But all England sleeps. . . . But next month I go to Germany. I shall have done England.

Cedric. You like Germany.

Gaston. Ah! What a country! What organisation! What science! Never sleeps! Always conquers! [*Patronisingly*.] Do you think in *your* business the Germans will not conquer, at the end?

Cedric. My business?

Gaston. Yes. Aeroplanes.

Cedric. So you know that?

Gaston. I know everything. . . . Look at aniline!

Cedric. Aniline?

Gaston. Yes. Aniline — colours.

Cedric. Ah! You mean aniline dyes.

Gaston. Yes, I said so.

Cedric. What about them?

Gaston. What about them? England invented them. Germany has taken them from you — all. That is science. All German now. So with aeroplanes. England and France — proud, very proud. But at the end, you will see . . . at the end.

Cedric. Oh!

Gaston. And soon.

Cedric. I say, if it isn't a rude question, how *did* you guess that we were — er — on our honeymoon? It might be useful for me to know.

Gaston. Ah, now — again! I read, I study. I alone in this sleepy place. By example, no afternoon newspapers — none — came into this place till I ordered one at the railway. I insisted. "The Piccadilly Gazette" — you know — Thackeray — "written by gentlemen for gentlemen." I read it every day. Ah! And is it not afraid of Germany!

Cedric. Do you mean there's something about my marriage in the "Piccadilly Gazette"?

Gaston. Yes. Do you want to read it?

Cedric. Well, I should rather like to see it, if I'm not interfering with your studies.

GASTON [*taking paper out of his pocket*]. There! [*Stands waiting in a suggestive attitude.*]

Cedric [*accepting paper*]. Thanks! [*Looks at him and gives him a tip.*]

Gaston [*pocketing the coin*]. Thanks! . . . And you will see about Klopstock too. [*Picking up tray.*]

Cedric. What about Klopstock?

Gaston. He comes to England soon as he has flyed at Breslau. Ah! You will see! [*Exit G. with tray. Cedric sits down with paper, and begins to read.*]

Cedric [*quietly*]. Oh! [*He drops the end of his cigarette into a flower-pot; then takes a cigar from his case, cuts it, puts it in his mouth, and produces a matchbox, but does not light it.*]

Cedric. Oh, indeed! [*He goes to the window, and taps on one of the closed panes. After a moment Flora appears at the open part of the window. Cedric, with a motion of the hand, indicates that he wishes her to enter.*]

Flora [*off, in a conspiratorial whisper*]. Has the reader of hearts quite gone? [*Cedric nods.*] Come out. [*Cedric beckons her inwards with his finger. Enter Flora, L.*]

Flora. Oh, Cedric! What a blow! We're the

honeymoon couple now of Pixton-on-Sea. How did he guess?

Cedric [*scarcely listening to her*]. Fluff, read this [*hands her paper with his finger on a particular paragraph*]. Top of second column.

Flora [*reads*]. "We are informed that Mr. Cedric Haslam, the celebrated aviator [*Cedric shows surprise*] was married privately this morning at Colchester to Mrs. Flora Lloyd, widow of the late Mr. Artemus Lloyd, stockbroker, who at one time was a well-known figure in the Kaffir Circus. Mr. and Mrs. Reach Haslam, the bridegroom's parents, and his brother, Mr. Charles Haslam, were present. The happy pair are spending the first part of the honeymoon at Pixton-on-Sea. By a curious coincidence, Mrs. Reach Haslam's new novel, 'The Wiving of the Chancellor,' appears on the very day of the marriage of her eldest son." [*Shaking her head.*] Only one thing is possible. Flight. Immediate flight! And plenty of it! Cedric, I suppose this is your dear mother's doing?

Cedric. I should doubt it. More probably some accidental leakage. She hates the very thought of self-advertisement.

Flora. Oh! I *know*. But I've always noticed she's somewhat unlucky in the matter of leakages. Your father ought to study plumbing.

Cedric [*slightly impatient*]. That's nothing.

That's not what I wanted you to read. I hadn't even noticed that. Look! [*Pointing to a paragraph.*]

Flora. "Dissensions in the Cabinet. Extraordinary rumours."

Cedric. No, no. [*Takes the paper and reads.*]
"The German Invasion. To-morrow, upon the conclusion of the Breslau meeting, Herr Klopstock will pack up his victorious new mono-plane and start for England. He announces his intention of trying within three weeks for the ten thousand pounds prize recently offered by the Aero Club to the first aviator who flies over Snowdon. Herr Klopstock, who has already, we understand, taken the whole of a hotel at Beddgelert for the accommodation of his staff, is convinced that his machine will rise easily to at least four thousand feet. The Kaiser has just christened the aeroplane the Black Eagle, by telegraph, and has assured the renowned aviator and ex-professor of the heartiest good wishes of himself and his house. His youngest grandchild, Prince — um — um — Fatherland — um — The news will certainly create a considerable sensation in England as it has done in Germany." I should say it would.

Flora. Why should it?

Cedric. What! The Kaiser's Black Eagle flying over the highest mountain in England, and getting ten thousand pounds for the job! It's unthinkable! How does it strike you?

Flora. It strikes me that it would have been much simpler and less expensive not to have offered the ten thousand pounds. It's altogether too tempting. Besides, it seems to me anybody ought to be able to fly over a little thing like Snowdon, seeing how they sail over the Pyrenees and all that sort of thing.

Cedric. My adorable child, don't talk like a member of the public. Henceforth you are in the know. The fogs alone make Snowdon worse than the Pyrenees. And then the Aero Club has been clever enough to ordain that the aviator is to start and land within four miles of the summit. How is a man to get off on such ground, and where is he to land without breaking wood? And then the business of finding his way! He's bound to do a lot of corkscrewing to get up, and nothing less than six thousand feet would be safe.

Flora [*with a gesture dismissing all that*]. Well, I don't think it's quite nice of Mr. Klopstock. It ought to have occurred to him. But then, it never does seem to occur to Germans. . . . I've often noticed that in hotels. They don't seem to perceive. [*Different tone.*] Will he succeed?

Cedric. He *might*. I don't think he would; not with his present horse-power; but he just might.

Flora. Well, most probably he won't. And then you can try in July as you originally intended, and get the money after all. Then there will have been some *sense* in the prize, anyway.

Cedric. It isn't the money.

Flora. Surely it isn't the mountain?

Cedric [*following his own thought*]. We've got to come out on top in this business. I must get to business in the middle of next week. It'll take a day to modify those wing-tips, and another to tune her up. Oh! I shall be ready long before he is. But I'll give him a chance to get nicely installed in his hotel. I should like Herr Klopstock and his crew to admire the beautiful scenery.

Flora [*casually*]. You must be at the works next week?

Cedric. It's me or nobody! No use trying to disguise that fact, Fluff!

Flora. Perhaps in the heat of the moment you've forgotten that you happened to get married this morning, Cedric.

Cedric. I wish we hadn't happened to get married this morning. [*She looks at him.*] I mean, I wish we'd happened to get married a week ago. Frantic nuisance! However, there you are! It simply means we shall be fixed up a bit sooner in the flat —

Flora. But the flat won't be anything like ready by next week.

Cedric. Never mind, we'll sleep at the Grand Babylon, or in the backyard. [*A little pause.*] Of course as a nuisance it completely baffles description. . . . To-day of all days. . . .

However, Fluff, as I said before with profound truth — there you are! It would never do in this world to give the German lot even a chance. The thing's too spectacular — altogether too spectacular. If it was a question of beating us quietly and for ever in technics or manufacture, the B.P. wouldn't think twice about it; but Snowdon is Snowdon, and a black eagle is a black eagle, and [*comically*] in short, madam, England will turn to your husband in its hour of peril. In other words, Fluff, it's up to me.

Flora [lightly]. I say, Cedric.

Cedric. Well?

Flora. I thought we were agreed about a full calendar month.

Cedric [after a pause; as lightly as possible]. Do you mean you think I ought to let Snowdon slide? Do you really —

Flora. Yes, of course. Don't you?

Cedric. You aren't serious?

Flora [persuasively]. My dearest boy, is there any reason why I shouldn't differ from you and yet be serious?

Cedric. No, of course not. But in a case like this — if there was anybody else to take my place, I wouldn't mind. Of course Smith-James could do it if only he would use our machine — but he won't. Nothing would induce him to. So as I keep on saying — there you are!

Flora. But what does it matter? Is it because

the other man's machine has been called the Black Eagle in a telegram that you ——

Cedric. Yes, partly.

Flora. Oh! So that if this canvas-backed duck flies first over a lump of mud called Snowdon ——

Cedric. But don't I tell you Snowdon is the highest mountain in England?

Flora. No, it isn't.

Cedric. Pardon me. Three thousand five hundred and seventy feet. The next highest is ——

Flora. Well, you go and tell Lloyd George that Snowdon is the highest mountain in England, and see what you'll get.

Cedric. Wales, then. It's all the same.

Flora [*with great charm*]. If you're thinking of the ten thousand pounds, I don't mind informing you, as a great secret, that I wouldn't sell a single day of my honeymoon with you for ten times ten thousand pounds. But I told you I wanted an expensive honeymoon, didn't I?

Cedric [*shaking his head and with calm certainty*]. The money doesn't influence me that much! [*Snaps his fingers.*] I don't wish to flatter myself, but I think I could light your cigarette with a bank note as gracefully as anybody. No ——

Flora. You're pulling away at that cigar of yours, but I suppose you know it isn't lighted.

Cedric. Isn't it? [*As he lights the cigar.*]

No! This Snowdon business. Well, it's a symbol [*half to himself*]. I wonder how I can make you understand that.

Flora [*fascinatingly*]. Oh! Force is unnecessary, I understand that. But who was it said just now that the honeymoon was a symbol? It stands for all our married life. It's the most exciting and interesting time we shall ever have. And you can't put a honeymoon off, you know. It isn't like a box of cigars that you can keep in a cupboard and enjoy one of them every now and then when you've got a few minutes to spare. It must happen now or never. You can't postpone it. You can only kill it. [*Smiles lightly.*]

Cedric [*taking hold of her, in a caressing tone*]. She's tragic!

Flora [*disengaging herself*]. Oh, no!

Cedric. Now just listen to me, Fluff. I'm really thinking at least as much of you as of myself. This affair is bound to have an influence on my career.

Flora. And what about its influence on mine?

Cedric. Same thing. I suppose our interests are identical.

Flora. My poor simple boy, do you really believe that?

Cedric. Well, dash it, aren't you my wife?

Flora. So far as I'm concerned, it would be more correct to say that you're my husband. In fact, you've got a career as my husband.

Cedric [*anxious to be fair*]. Certainly. And you as my wife. But ——

Flora. One second, dearest. You're unique as an aviator, aren't you?

Cedric [*conventionally modest*]. Oh — well ——

Flora. Now. Man to man. Give your modesty a rest. Really, don't you consider you've proved yourself unique in your line?

Cedric [*hesitatingly, chivalrously*]. I suppose I'm just about as unique in my line as you are in yours, my dear.

Flora. Now that's very nice of you.

Cedric. Not at all.

Flora. Yes, it is, because it's exactly what I wanted you to say. You've often said that I'm unique, and I just wanted you to say it again at this identical particular instant. Of course I could have reminded you of it, but that wouldn't have been quite so effective. That's why it's very nice of you.

Cedric. So you are unique — I'll say it as often as you like.

Flora. I warn you, you're giving yourself away.

Cedric. Delighted!

Flora. I wouldn't care to repeat all the lovely adjectives you've used about me. If you weren't such a determined enemy of gush and superlatives — people might suspect that sometimes you exag-

gerated the tiniest bit when you talked about me, to me. But of course *I* know you never do exaggerate, at any rate consciously, and *you* know you're a very good judge.

Cedric. What of?

Flora. Us! . . . Now look here, Cedric, don't you think it would be a pity to stop this creature, who is so unique in her line, from giving a full exhibition of her unique powers at a unique moment; at the very height of her career. You know, she'll never have another opportunity like this of proving that she really is unique in her line.

Cedric. What do you call her line? Let's be clear.

Flora [*quietly, off-handedly, after a pause*]. To charm. Merely that.

Cedric. By God! She can do that. But [*winningly, but half to himself*], I hardly know how to put it.

Flora. I think you do, dearest; but you're so nice, you don't like to. You wanted to make a comparison between the importance of your line and the importance of mine. I admit all that. I'm quite humble. I fully admit that if Hyde Park were full of aviators and Battersea Park were full of charming young women, rather pretty and — er — chic — [*gesture to show off her frock*] — I fully admit that not a man among you would ever *dream* — of crossing the river. I

fully admit that if every aviator in Europe gave up business to-morrow the entire world would go into mourning, whereas if all the charming women retired from business they'd never be missed. Still —

Cedric [*appreciative*]. You're a witty girl —

Flora. We're both rather witty, aren't we, at times?

Cedric. But the fact is I wasn't going to make any comparison at all between our respective lines. I was only going to point out that you can keep on being charming all the time. You're always charming; you're always doing *your* line. Whereas for my line I have to choose times and seasons — or rather I don't choose 'em, they're chosen for me, as, for instance, just now. Wherever we are, honeymoon or no honeymoon, you're — well, you're giving an exhibition flight.

Flora. Now, Cedric, your good nature's getting the better of your sincerity. I'm not always charming. Ask your dear mother. And have you forgotten our historic shindy about the length of your moustache scarcely three months ago? I'm *not* always charming. And I don't *want* to be always charming. Who would? As for exhibition flights, you've never seen me give one. You think you have, but what you've seen up to now is nothing. I don't mind telling you that I had arranged a rather sensational exhibition flight for the next month. It would last just thirty-one

days. I don't mind telling you that I've thought a good deal about it, and made all my elaborate preparations. It really would be a pity to interfere with it. And you know it can't be postponed. I don't choose time and season any more than you do.

Cedric. But surely, Fluff, this flight can proceed, as I say, wherever we are?

Flora. You think so? And what about my grandstand?

Cedric. I shall always be your grandstand.

Flora. Shall you? I can only do my best when I've got the undivided attention of my audience. I hope I should never come *quite* to earth, but I don't see myself being unique in my line for the benefit of a man who is busy [*with the faintest touch of irony in her tone*] counting the misfires in his motor, or dreaming about the barometer.

Cedric. Naturally, if you don't see the importance of this Snowdon business to us —

Flora [*consciously very charming again*]. But I do see it perfectly well. A woman unique in her own line is not necessarily a gaping idiot in every other line. I admit the immense importance of Snowdon to us. I won't argue. In my time I've been told that I was too well-dressed to be able to argue. I simply want to ask you this — what, for you, is the *most* important thing in life? Now, let's be straight. Have you married as a supreme end, or is your supreme end to move yourself

about in the air without visible means of support? Now [*smiling*], look me in the face, and be a man.

Cedric. You're putting very fundamental questions.

Flora. Is marriage a relaxation from flying, or do you fly in order to have the means for practising the whole art of marriage under favourable conditions? Do you live most intensely when you're battling with the breeze, or when you're [*dropping her voice*] with me? I only want to know. Because if you live most intensely when you're with me, this honeymoon should be worth more to us than forty Snowdons.

Cedric [*a little coldly*]. Say no more, Snowdon is chucked. Of course, my position is impossible. You have only to insist.

Flora [*losing her self-control*]. Insist? *Insist* that you neglect an aeroplane so that you can stay with me? My dear boy, I'm incapable of taking such a mean advantage of an aeroplane. An aeroplane can't insist. And I can assure you I shan't.

Cedric. Do you know that you're scarcely logical?

Flora. Not logical? In not insisting?

Cedric [*somewhat at a loss*]. I mean generally. For instance, when we began, your first argument was that we couldn't shorten the honeymoon because the flat wouldn't be ready.

Flora. One can't think of everything at once. You mustn't forget I've never been called to the

bar. If I'd known what was coming, no doubt I should have prepared my case and had it typewritten, and sent copies to the press. . . . And then what about your being illogical?

Cedric. Me?

Flora. Yes. When I ask you for a straight answer you protest that I'm putting very fundamental questions. Did you expect me to put shallow questions? Did you expect me to enquire whether you'd used Pears' soap?

Cedric. Now look here, Fluffiest —

Flora [angry]. Cedric, I wish you wouldn't call me that. You've only started it since we were married. I can stand Fluff, but I don't like Fluffy, and my objection to Fluffiest is intense.

Cedric. I beg your pardon.

Flora [recovering herself, sweetly]. It's I who beg yours. For the moment I was forgetting that "common superficial politeness" that you ranked with common-sense.

Cedric. My dear child, everything's all right. The honeymoon shall not be shortened by a single day. Everything's absolutely all right.

Flora [shakes her head]. It isn't. You're only giving way to please me.

Cedric. Well, really — [*laughing*].

Flora. Cedric. Honestly. Yes or no. Do you think I ought to yield to the aeroplane?

Cedric [they look at each other]. I think you oughtn't to ask quite such questions?

Flora [agreeing]. No. Such questions ought to be asked earlier. But human nature is so — human, that probably it wouldn't be any use asking them any earlier. They might even be considered rude. In fact, it *is* considered rude for *fiancés* to worry each other with any questions that really matter. [*Pause. In a vague voice.*] Whether you prefer a flat or a house, and the colour of the drawing-room chairs — that's about as far as you are supposed to go. [*Another pause.*] Well?

Cedric [approaching her]. What?

Flora. Do you think I ought to yield to the aeroplane?

Cedric [stands still, very firmly]. My dear girl, if you ask me to be straight, I think the Snowdon business isn't a thing to be neglected. [*Pause at high tension.*]

Flora [plaintively]. Common-sense doesn't seem to be such a wonderful cure for difficulties after all. [*Fiercely.*] Oh! If I had faith, wouldn't I just move that mountain into the sea! [*Gives a sob.*]

Cedric. Flora, what can I say?

Flora [controlling herself]. There's nothing else to be said — by either of us. It's — it's hopeless. [*Enter Charles Haslam, R., cautiously. He is in motoring attire.*]

Charles [at the door, to someone outside]. It's all right. We've caught 'em [*within the room*].

Cedric [*extremely puzzled; frowning*]. Hello!
Charles. Hello! . . . Flora, what's the matter?

Flora [*collecting herself; ironically*]. Oh, nothing! nothing! This is a nice kind idea of yours, to come and relieve our solitude, but did you expect us not to be startled? [*Enter Mr. Reach Haslam.*]

Cedric. Hello. [*Mr. Reach Haslam gives a deprecating gesture.*]

Mr. R. Haslam. My dear Flora! [*Enter Mrs. Reach Haslam.*]

Cedric. Any more? [*Enter Gaston.*]

Flora. Well, this is a pleasure. Unusual, perhaps —

Mrs. Reach Haslam. My dear son, my dear Flora — [*Turns to Mr. Reach Haslam.*]
Father — [*Stops.*]

Mr. Reach Haslam [*to Gaston, who is hovering inquisitively about*]. If there is the slightest doubt in your mind as to the exact geographical situation of the door —

Gaston. Please? [*Meaning "I beg your pardon, I didn't catch what you said!" Mr. Reach Haslam goes to door, R., and signals to Gaston to depart. Exit Gaston. Mr. Reach Haslam closes door.*]

Cedric [*aside to Charles*]. What the hell's up?

Charles [*loudly*]. Well, Rick —

Mrs. R. Haslam. Charles, what did I tell you before you came in? I'll thank you to go and sit down over there. [*Charles obeys.*]

Flora. Suppose we all sit down, shall we? Well, what *did* you tell him before he came in?

Mrs. R. Haslam [*sits*]. Believe me, Flora, I never felt so unequal to a situation in my life.

Cedric. Look here, dad, do you mind telling me in one word what this is all about?

Mrs. R. Haslam. Yes, your father will tell you. The circumstances are exceedingly difficult — in fact, painful. But they have to be faced, and faced with dignity. The various necessary steps must be taken, in their proper order, very carefully. The first step is to inform you and Flora of the facts. Your father will inform you; as the head of the family, and the fount of authority, the statement comes more properly from him. I decided that absolutely as we motored down. [*To Mr. Reach Haslam.*] Dear ——

Mr. R. Haslam. Yes, dear. [*To Cedric and Flora.*] You know we went straight back to town when you'd left the church. As soon as we had ——

Mrs. R. Haslam [*interrupting, to Cedric and Flora*]. You needn't be alarmed. As I said, the circumstances are painful, but once faced as we shall face them, they really amount to nothing. The principal thing was to catch you in time. Thank heaven, we've done that!

Charles. Thank my masterly and audacious driving!

Mrs. R. Haslam [*staring him down*]. If we had failed! [*Gesture of despair to Mr. Reach Haslam.*] Dear ——

Mr. R. Haslam [*nodding to her politely*]. As soon as we had finished lunch your mother set herself to work, her work being very much behind ——

Mrs. R. Haslam. Never mind all that. Do it as gently as you can, but come to the point at once. I am quite sure that is best.

Mr. R. Haslam. The telephone?

Mrs. R. Haslam. The telephone.

Mr. R. Haslam [*nodding to her politely*]. We were rung up on the telephone. Your mother was walking about in meditation, and as she was nearest to the telephone she answered it. She then said to me, "It's the Bishop of Colchester." I was at the desk. In another moment she asked me to come to the telephone and listen for myself as she could scarcely believe her ears. I did so, and the Bishop — he was telephoning from the Palace at Colchester — repeated at my request what he had said to your mother, namely, that that curate who — er — officiated this morning, suddenly awakened to a sense of beauty ——

Mrs. R. Haslam. Sense of duty.

Mr. R. Haslam. I quite understood "beauty." It's true the Bishop hasn't got a good telephone voice — probably more impressive at a confirma-

tion than on the telephone. I heard "beauty." However —

Mrs. R. Haslam. Sense of duty.

Mr. R. Haslam. No doubt you are right. I seemed to gather that it was Flora's beauty that had roused his conscience.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Oh, no!

Flora. That had what?

Charles [*coming towards the group, unable to control his impatience*]. Oh, hang it! The curate was a sham curate — not a curate at all.

Cedric [*taking it in*]. A sham curate!

Flora. But surely such things don't happen?

Mrs. R. Haslam. That's what many people said when I made a shopwalker successfully personate an archdeacon in "The Woman of Kent." Everyone said so until Mr. Gladstone wrote that he found the episode quite convincing. You remember, dear?

Mr. R. Haslam. Vividly.

Mrs. R. Haslam. I assure you it happens quite frequently that from one cause or another people who think they are married are not married. Why, sometimes special Acts of Parliament have to be passed in order to set things right — when they've gone altogether too far. I well recall that when I studied this subject, as of course I did, coming across a case in which, owing to a church having been consecrated very carelessly, a lady who sup-

posed herself to be the legitimate mother of sixteen children — poor thing ——

Flora [interrupting]. But do you mean to say we aren't married?

Mrs. R. Haslam. Well, of course, I want to put it as gently as possible, but the fact is —— [*looking at her husband*].

Mr. R. Haslam. It would be an exaggeration to say that you are married.

Mrs. R. Haslam. If my idea had been accepted of having the Bishop to officiate — and he would have been only too enchanted — in the cathedral, this dreadful thing could not have occurred. No case of personating a bishop has ever been known.

Cedric. But what are we to do?

Charles [airily]. Well, you must make the best of it.

Mrs. R. Haslam [outraged]. Certainly not, Charles, you are astounding. It would have looked better of you if you had remained outside in charge of the car. Make the best of it, indeed! [*To Mr. Reach Haslam.*] Father ——

Mr. R. Haslam [to Cedric]. For the moment a policy of masterly inactivity seems to be indicated.

[*Curtain.*]

NOTES ON CHARACTERS IN ACT II

THE BISHOP OF COLCHESTER. Celibate. The typical Bishop, who, while the bent of his mind is reactionary, convinces himself that he is exceedingly modern, and moving with the rapid times. No real intellectual quality, but energetic and self-adaptive.

MR. FRAMPINGTON. A bland young man, with perfect manners and perfect sangfroid. A single-minded person of immense intellectual and spiritual originality. To himself he does not seem at all peculiar, but merely natural.

CUTHBERT. Just a plain modern butler. I particularly do not want this trifling part to be embroidered by the conventional butler "business." If any genuine realistic butler "business" can be brought into it, well and good.

ACT II

SCENE.—*Mrs. Reach Haslam's study. A large apartment, richly and suitably furnished. The retreat of one of the most successful, most wealthy, and most majestic novelists in the world. Large and splendid desk [for two people, sitting opposite each other] about the middle of the room. Door back leading to hall, etc. Door, L., leading to drawing-room. Down stage, left, a sofa, which is partly hidden by a screen from the view of anyone entering by door, L. Date calendar on desk. Telephone. All the Haslams except Charles are in evening dress. Flora is elaborately attired, with a light Egyptian shawl on her shoulders, and a fan.*

TIME.—*Same evening. Immediately after dinner. The Bishop is waiting, alone. Enter to him, from door back, Mrs. Reach Haslam, followed by Mr. Reach Haslam.*

Mrs. R. Haslam [as she enters]. Ah! Bishop! How good of you! [Shakes hands.]

Bishop [shaking hands with Mr. Reach Haslam]. My dear Mrs. Reach Haslam. Not at all! I blush for my diocese — that such a deplorable

and distressing accident should have occurred in it.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Then it really is true?

Bishop. But I told you on the telephone.

Mrs. R. Haslam. I know, I know! I was only hoping against hope that perhaps after all you might have found that the marriage was legal.

Bishop [*shaking his head*]. No. His late father was undoubtedly in orders, his late brother also. But he himself was no more ordained than you are. [*To Mr. Reach Haslam, who recoils.*] He presumed on his relationships. . . . In fact, his sole qualification seems to have been two old suits of his brother's.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Well, after all, it is perhaps better so.

Bishop. Better, dear lady?

Mrs. R. Haslam. I mean that you have *not* brought good news at the eleventh hour. Really — [*Looking at Mr. Reach Haslam.*]

Mr. R. Haslam [*to whom the Bishop, puzzled, turns for an explanation*]. My wife, with her novelist's instinct, perceives the situation that would be created if we had to go into the drawing-room now and say to them suddenly, "Well, you are married, after all."

Mrs. R. Haslam. Excessively delicate. They would naturally have to leave the house at once.

Bishop. Quite so. I cannot tell you how relieved I was to get your wire saying that you had overtaken them in time. Young people make such

a mystery of the honeymoon nowadays that often they don't even leave a postal address. A dangerous innovation!

Mr. R. Haslam. Evidently.

Bishop. I gather that you have brought them both here, poor things!

Mrs. R. Haslam. It seemed the wisest course. I consulted my husband, and he quite agreed with me that in view of the unusual circumstances we ought to act with the greatest prudence — for *their* sakes! And so we motored quietly back to town and got here just in time for dinner. My son drove. I sat by his side. There wasn't room for their heavy luggage, and so Charlie is bringing that up by train. Charles is my other son. . . .
[*Sighs.*] And here we are!

Bishop. Admirable! It's a case of ——

Mr. R. Haslam. As you were.

Bishop. Just so! Really a terrible blow to them — must have been! And to you, and to you! An appalling shock! How have they borne it?

Mrs. R. Haslam. Well — [*turning to Mr. R. Haslam.*] Father, how should you say they have borne it?

Mr. R. Haslam. Grimly. That is — on the grim side.

Bishop. Ah!

Mrs. R. Haslam. Of course, my Lord, we are taking it for granted that the matter can be put right to-morrow, without fail, and beyond question.

I have tried to comfort them with that absolute assurance.

Bishop. My dear lady. Without fail! At any hour! *any* hour . . . up to three o'clock. That is why I have come specially to town — to convince you by my presence of my horror at the — er — crime, my sympathy with its innocent victims, and my utter determination that the ceremony shall be performed again to-morrow morning under my personal supervision and guarantee. I feel that I cannot do too much. [*During the last words enter Cuthbert, back, with salver of letters and press cuttings, followed by parlour-maid with a tray of newspaper packets.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Will you excuse my husband while he deals with the post?

Bishop. I beg — [*Mr. Reach Haslam sits down to desk and takes the post. Exeunt Servants.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. I ought to apologise for receiving you in my study, but I thought — my husband thought — we had better see you first alone. Are those the press cuttings, father? [*Mr. Reach Haslam, nodding, opens press cuttings.*]

Bishop. But for this unfortunate *contretemps*, what a charming coincidence that your new book should be published to-day of all days!

Mrs. R. Haslam. So you find time in your busy life, Bishop, to keep abreast of modern literature — even novels?

Bishop. *Even* novels! My dear lady, there is no greater force for good.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Or for evil — alas!

Bishop. Quite so! I have often thought — I have indeed said so from the platform — that the two most truly important influences for good in our generation are your novels and the leaflets of the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Indeed! Father, do you recall that press-cutting?

Mr. R. Haslam [*busy*]. No.

Bishop. It was reported in our Diocesan Magazine.

Mrs. R. Haslam. And yet, my dear Bishop, I have more than once felt it my duty to criticise the Church rather sharply in my work.

Bishop. I know, I know. We bow the head, we kiss the rod.

Mrs. R. Haslam. In my new novel I am back in politics again. Have you seen it yet?

Bishop. No, not yet. But I have already ordered it from Boot's.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Boot's?

Bishop. Yes, the cash chemists. I find their circulating library the most economical of all. And I have to be particular. As you know, I publish every year a detailed account of all my expenditure, personal and otherwise, and too large a sum

for books might be misconstrued as self-indulgence, especially in a bachelor.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Ah, yes. [*Handing him a book.*] Here is a copy.

Bishop. Pretty cover.

Mr. R. Haslam [*to his wife, in a low tone*]. Twenty-one columns.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*pleased*]. Really!

Bishop [*looking up*]. Twenty-one columns?

Mrs. R. Haslam. We are treating you without ceremony, my dear Bishop. My husband has just calculated the total length of the reviews of my book that have appeared in the London papers on the first day. Of course we attach no value whatever to the actual opinions expressed — the critics have to work in such a hurry — and they are so sadly unfitted for their work, poor dears — but the amount of space given is an excellent indication of the public importance ascribed to the book.

Bishop [*who has been inspecting the book*]. How true!

Mrs. R. Haslam [*to Mr. Reach Haslam*]. Anything special?

Mr. R. Haslam. No. "Surpassed herself," seven or eight times. "Masterpiece," fourteen times. The "Piccadilly Gazette" is unfavourable.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Very?

Mr. R. Haslam. Yes.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Better tell me.

Mr. R. Haslam [*deprecating gesture, reads*].

"The book is of course admirable in workmanship, knowledge and insight, but Mrs. Reach Haslam has not, if the truth must be told, surpassed herself."

Mrs. R. Haslam. If I'd known about that when I saw their lady reporter this morning! . . .

Bishop [putting the book down]. Enthralling narrative! Enthralling! Now, my dear lady [*rising*].

Mrs. R. Haslam [interrupting him]. Please sit down. As you are having a glimpse of me in my profession to-night, I want to ask you one or two professional questions — about the psychology of that false curate.

Bishop [sitting down again]. Yes, yes. Psychology. Just so.

Mrs. R. Haslam. I never lose an opportunity of gathering material. Father, will you mind taking down? My husband is good enough to act as my stenographer.

Bishop. Touching!

Mrs. R. Haslam. Now I noticed nothing remarkable about that curate.

Bishop [agreeing]. No. And yet, you know — curious thing — he's a gentleman, quite! Oh, quite! And I even remember once meeting his father, when I was Court Chaplain, at a garden party in aid of the Additional Curates Society.

Mr. R. Haslam [repeating what he has written]. Curates Society.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But why should he choose to

personate a curate? That is what is so interesting to a novelist. Why a curate? It couldn't have been for the money, or the glory.

Mr. R. Haslam. Glory.

Bishop. The case is highly peculiar. He is certainly not without means, or brains. My opinion is that his action was due to excessive intellectual curiosity. He told me he wanted to feel what it was like to be a curate.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Yet he looked quite sane.

Bishop. Oh, quite! Astonishing story! His brother, through the influence of the Primate, had been engaged as curate, by the Vicar of St. Saviour's, Colchester, subject to an interview. This brother had been doing some chaplaining in Switzerland — just rough winter work. On the way home he died suddenly in Paris. Well, our friend of this morning calmly took up the dead man's identity. Came to Colchester, conquered the simple Vicar, and was at once accepted. That was two months ago.

Mr. R. Haslam. Ago.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But how dangerous.

Bishop. So I pointed out to him. His reply was that it was just the danger that had attracted him — coupled with the desire to understand why the members of his family had had such a passion for curacy. It seems that two of his sisters have espoused curates. This will be a grievous blow for all of them.

Mr. R. Haslam. All of them.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But why should the man be struck with remorse just now?

Bishop. Well, his explanation is that he was so moved by the bride's beauty.

Mr. R. Haslam. Duty.

Bishop. Beauty. [*Gesture of mild triumph from Mr. Reach Haslam to Mrs. Reach Haslam.*] He could not bear to think that any action of his should cause — er — inconvenience to a woman so beautiful. Hence he came to me at once. Fortunately I happened to be at the Palace.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Had he performed any other marriages?

Bishop. Happily none; but he had celebrated ten funerals and four baptisms. However, these did not seem to trouble him in the least, I regret to say. It was the wedding alone that roused his conscience.

Mr. R. Haslam. Conscience.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Of course you sent for the police.

Bishop. I trust and believe that he is now in prison. But I did not send for the police. The Church has its dignity to maintain against the civil judicature in these modern days. Also with so much irreligion — shall I say? — flaunting in the very air, She must avoid scandal — particularly local scandal. London scandal is less deleterious. Accordingly I brought the young man up to town

with me, and I put him into a cab for the police-station, where he will surrender himself of his own free will to the law. I prefer that way. It is, perhaps, original; but nowadays we Bishops have to be original.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But do you really suppose he has surrendered?

Bishop. I am sure of it. I cannot pretend to your skill in reading character, dear lady, but I know a gentleman at sight.

Mr. R. Haslam. Sight.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Of course, if one put such a story into a novel, it would never be believed. That's the worst of real life.

Bishop. And yet this distressing affair reminded me strongly of the false archdeacon in "The Woman of Kent."

Mrs. R. Haslam [*pleased*]. Ah! You remember my early book?

Bishop [*protestingly*]. My dear lady! You have no more earnest student! And may I add that from the first I found that episode of the false archdeacon entirely convincing. Its convincingness was one of the very few points on which I shared the opinions of the late Mr. Gladstone. "The Woman of Kent" has always been a favourite of mine among your novels. It must have had a vast circulation.

Mrs. R. Haslam. How many copies, father?

Mr. R. Haslam [*without looking up from the desk*]. One hundred and seventy-two thousand.

Bishop. Wonderful memory!

Mrs. R. Haslam. Is it not? He knows more about my books than I do myself, far more.

Bishop. Touching. [*Rising*.] I must go — reluctantly. Now what time shall we say for to-morrow morning? I am absolutely at your disposal.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But do we understand that you mean to conduct the ceremony in person?

Bishop. I do. I wish particularly to show by my presence at the altar my sense of what complete reparation is due to you — due to you all.

Mrs. R. Haslam. I think we had better consult Flora herself. [*Rings bell*.] As you know, my original intention was that you should be asked to preside at the ceremony. But the young people insisted on a simple curate — doubtless from modesty, my dear Bishop. . . . Would that I had been firm in the first instance! [*Enter Cuthbert, back*.]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Is Mrs. Lloyd in the drawing-room?

Cuthbert. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. R. Haslam. With Mr. Cedric?

Cuthbert. No, ma'am. She is alone.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Will you tell her that I should be very much obliged if she could join us here for a moment.

Cuthbert. Yes, ma'am. . . . A representative of the "Piccadilly Gazette" has just called, ma'am — for information. A male representative.

Mrs. R. Haslam. "The Piccadilly"! [*To Mr. R. Haslam.*] The audacity! [*To Cuthbert.*] About what? [*Cuthbert makes a gesture of embarrassment.*] You told him to call again to-morrow?

Cuthbert. No, ma'am. He's waiting.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Father, would you mind going out to him? [*Exit Cuthbert.*] I really wonder at Cuthbert! [*To Bishop.*] We have an absolute rule against seeing journalists after dinner. As you know, Bishop, I detest notoriety. Hence our rule. And yet Cuthbert allows this man to wait!

Mr. R. Haslam [*going to door*]. Cuthbert is not himself. Cuthbert has been staggered by the events of the day. The strain of pretending that nothing in the least unusual has happened must be tremendous. Allowance should be made for Cuthbert. How shall I treat this invader? [*The Bishop dips into the novel.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Well, without actually mentioning their review, perhaps you might just indicate by your manner —

Mr. R. Haslam. These journalists are so obtuse, but still —

Mrs. R. Haslam. I think perhaps if you said that we cannot understand how a purely private

matter can interest the public, but that if they *must* know, the Bishop is here in person, and ——
[*Mr. Reach Haslam nods.*] You think that will be judicious?

Mr. R. Haslam. Quite. [*Exit back.*]

Bishop [*putting down the book*]. Enthralling!
[*Enter Flora, L.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Flora, darling, this is the Bishop of Colchester — Mrs. Lloyd, my — er — prospective daughter-in-law.

Flora [*stiffly*]. My lord.

Bishop. My dear young lady, I have already tried to express to Mrs. Haslam my consternation, my shame, at the ——

Flora [*smiling coldly*]. I am sure that is sufficient.

Mrs. R. Haslam. The Bishop has come to town specially to see us, Flora. In order to guard against any possibility of further accident, he has kindly suggested that he should officiate himself to-morrow morning.

Flora [*to Bishop*]. It's really very good of you.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*relieved*]. Is it not?

Bishop. At what hour? I am entirely at your disposal.

Flora. Oh, any time!

Bishop. Noon? If you come down by the nine-fifteen train ——

Flora. That will do perfectly.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Where is Cedric, dear?

Flora. I have no idea. Shall I see? [*Exit, L.*]

Bishop. The dear child has evidently been much upset.

Mrs. R. Haslam. We all have.

Bishop. Ravishing creature! Who was Mr. Lloyd?

Mrs. R. Haslam. He seems to have been on the Stock Exchange. He was a Colchester man, and had a house just outside the town.

Bishop. Indeed! I never met him. Did he leave a large fortune?

Mrs. R. Haslam. Oh, no! The house — not much else, I believe.

Bishop. Probably an admiration for your work was the original basis of the — er —

Mrs. R. Haslam. Oh, no! I was first introduced to Mrs. Lloyd by Charlie, my second son. In fact, quite confidentially, Bishop; we thought it was a match between *them*.

Bishop. But heaven decided otherwise?

Mrs. R. Haslam. Cedric decided otherwise.
[*Enter Mr. R. Haslam, back.*]

Mr. R. Haslam. Flora tells me that it is arranged for to-morrow.

Bishop. Yes. I have just been hearing from Mrs. Haslam how this beautiful young lady has attracted both your sons.

Mr. R. Haslam. Very catching. Ran through the family.

Bishop. Ha, ha! [*Seriously*]. Ravishing creature!

Mrs. R. Haslam. Has Charlie come yet?

Mr. R. Haslam. No.

Mrs. R. Haslam. If he isn't here soon I fear he'll be late for the office. And he's had no sleep to-day, poor boy. [*To Bishop.*] Charles is the assistant manager of the circulation department of the "Daily Sentinel," and his hours are from 9.30 at night till three in the morning.

Bishop. How trying! I'm afraid we little think when we open our newspaper at breakfast — I always read the "Sentinel" — we little think what an immense amount of endeavour — [*Enter Charles, back.*]

Charles. Hullo! Mater. No trace of any dinner for me in the dining-room. Here you stick me up with the luggage and all the dirty work —

Mrs. R. Haslam. Charles, the Bishop of Colchester.

Bishop. We have met once before, I think. [*Shaking hands.*] Now, dear Mrs. Haslam [*looking at his watch*], I have half an hour to get to Liverpool Street.

Mrs. R. Haslam. You return to Colchester to-night?

Bishop. Essential! I have a midnight procession of drunkards. You know they call me "the drunkards' Bishop." I am proud of the title.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*shaking hands*]. Exceedingly good of you to have come.

Bishop. Not at all. The obligation is mine for your forbearance. Now — may I presume on our slight acquaintanceship? If at any time you should think of adding a Bishop to your wonderful gallery of contemporary portraits, and I could be of assistance — need I say more?

Mrs. R. Haslam. I have already drawn two.

Bishop. Really?

Mr. R. Haslam. Suffragans, my dear.

Bishop. Ah! Suffragans! I thought I could not have forgotten two Bishops. Till to-morrow then, at noon. Young man, till to-morrow. [*Shakes hands with Charles.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam [*as Bishop and Mr. R. Haslam go out*]. Father, would you mind speaking firmly to Cuthbert about Charlie's dinner? [*Exeunt Bishop and Mr. Reach Haslam, back.*]

Charles. Why the Bishop?

Mrs. R. Haslam. He came up specially to arrange for to-morrow. Certainly it was the least he could do.

Charles. To-morrow?

Mrs. R. Haslam. The wedding.

Charles. Oh, yes, of course, I was forgetting.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Really, Charlie, you get more and more absent-minded as you grow older. I'm not sorry Cedric won't let you meddle with aero-

planes. The wedding will be at noon to-morrow. We go down by the nine-fifteen.

Charles. With all that luggage again! It would have been simpler to leave it where it was. Seven trunks! What with cabs, tips, fares, excess, and a special omnibus, somebody owes me one pound thirteen, not to speak of compensation for the total loss of tea, dinner, and temper.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Well, you are always enthusiastic about Flora's clothes. We acted for the best. We couldn't tell exactly what would happen. Fortunately the Bishop saw at once that it was his duty to take things in hand himself.

Charles. I should say that what the Bishop saw was a chance of getting himself into one of your books, mater.

Mrs. R. Haslam. That also is possible.

Charles [*imitating the Bishop*]. "Need I say more?" What a cuckoo!

Mrs. R. Haslam. Charles! [*Enter Cedric, L.*]

Cedric. Has that dashed Bishop actually departed? I began to think he was going to spend the night here.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Cedric! I am ready to make great allowances, but I *really* do not know what has come over my sons.

Cedric. Sorry, mother. [*To Charles.*] Hello! You back?

Mrs. R. Haslam. Flora's told you it's all arranged for noon to-morrow?

Cedric. No. Haven't seen her.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Well, it is. And now, my boys, you can't stay any longer in your mother's study. My article for "Harper's" must absolutely be finished to-night. Your father and I had been expecting a placid afternoon and evening of work.

Charles. By the way, Rick. About that Klopstock business. Of course you've seen the papers. [*Cedric nods.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Oh, yes. I quite intended to mention that, Cedric; but really one has had so many things to think about — and my article, too! How very awkward it is, isn't it?

Charles. I met one of our johnnies at Liverpool Street, and he was a little excited about it. And I may inform you it isn't often our johnnies do get excited.

Cedric. Oh! [*Sits down on sofa.*]

Charles. He told me they'd received a later wire at the office, from Breslau, saying that Klopstock has had a private trial over a mountain near there — I forget the name — and done it, my boy! Done it on his head!

Cedric. Has he, indeed?

Charles. And he'll be over here in a week or ten days, it seems. They want to know at the office exactly what you're going to do. So I told the johnnie I should be seeing you to-night, and I'd bring an official message. I had to explain to him

a bit what had happened — couldn't help it. I suppose you'll be forced to cut the honeymoon next week and begin to get things into shape at once.

Mrs. R. Haslam. It is annoying for you, dear, and for Flora, too!

Cedric. I shan't do any such thing.

Charles. You surely won't let him ——

Cedric. I shan't do anything for a full month.

Charles. Do you mean to say you'll let Klopstock get in first?

Cedric. If Klopstock chooses to try during my honeymoon, I can't help that, can I? Let somebody else have a shot. I'm not the only aviator in England, confound it!

Mrs. R. Haslam. Cedric!

Charles. You're the only aviator in England that can get in front of Klopstock over Snowdon.

Cedric. I can't help that.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But, Cedric — surely your duty ——

Cedric. Oh! d—— [*stopping himself. Enter Flora. As soon as she perceives Cedric, who has been hidden from her by the screen, she makes as if to leave the room again.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam [*recalling her*]. Flora.

Flora [*with false simplicity*]. So you are back, Charlie. What an angel you've been to worry yourself with all that big luggage.

Charlie. Oh! That's all right [*surveying her*]. I see you had at least one frock in the port-

manteau. We were just discussing the Snowdon flight. So you two have decided ——

Flora. No, we really settled nothing. Cedric alone settles that, of course. All questions relating to aeroplanes should be addressed to the head of the flying department and not to the firm.

Cedric [*rising, with restrained savageness*]. I tell you I shall do nothing whatever for a full month. [*Exit, L.*]

Charles [*trying to break the extreme awkwardness caused by Cedric's behaviour, in a bantering but affectionate tone*]. I suspect the fact is that the bones of a husband are doubly precious in her sight.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But you don't really think there is any special danger, do you, Flora dear?

Flora. Of course not. If I wasn't convinced that Cedric in his aeroplane is a great deal safer than Charlie in a motor-car, or Paderewski at the end of a concert, or a cabinet minister at a public meeting, should I have gone as far as marrying him?

Mrs. R. Haslam. Then, seeing how serious it is for the country, why ——

Flora. My dear, you must ask Cedric. I don't interfere with business. [*Enter Cuthbert, back.*]

Cuthbert. A Mr. Frampington, to see the Bishop, ma'am. I told him his Grace had gone, and now he asks to see either you or Mr. Haslam.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Mr. Frampington? Where is your master?

Cuthbert. I believe he's in the kitchen at the moment, ma'am.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Frampington?

Charles. Wasn't that the name of our young hopeful this morning?

Flora [*brightening again*]. The imitation curate? Of course it was!

Mrs. R. Haslam. But surely —

Cuthbert. He bears no resemblance to a curate, ma'am.

Flora. Then it is he! Oh! if it is, do let's see him! In private life he must be extremely interesting. [*To Cuthbert.*] Show him in, will you, please? [*Exit Cuthbert.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Flora — really I don't know what's come over you all!

Flora. It seems to me that the curate has come over us all. [*Enter Cuthbert, and Frampington in tourist attire. Exit Cuthbert.*]

Frampington [*in a quite natural, easy tone*]. We meet again. I'm so sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Haslam, but I'm in a slight difficulty, and I hoped to find the Bishop here.

Mrs. R. Haslam. The Bishop left a few minutes ago.

Flora. Won't you sit down? [*Outraged glance from Mrs. R. Haslam. Frampington sits*

down calmly.] May one inquire what this slight difficulty is?

Frampington [after a little hesitation]. I suppose the Bishop has explained everything?

Mrs. R. Haslam. So far as everything is capable of explanation, yes.

Frampington. I'm glad of that. It makes the situation so much easier. No doubt the Bishop gave you all the messages of apology and regret that I asked him to deliver on my behalf.

Flora [to Mrs. Reach Haslam]. Did he?

Mrs. R. Haslam. No. He only spoke for himself.

Frampington. That was not nice of him.

Mrs. R. Haslam. He told us you were a gentleman —

Frampington. Generous!

Mrs. R. Haslam. And that you had promised to go to the police-station and give yourself up of your own accord.

Frampington. Quite correct. And as soon as I'd got something to eat I took a cab and went to Vine Street. Well, they refused to take me in.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Refused to take you in!

Frampington. Wouldn't even take my name.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But did you tell them clearly what you'd done — your crime?

Frampington. I was most explicit.

Flora. I suppose it is a crime.

Frampington. Oh, yes! It's a crime all right.

As far as the Bishop and I could make out, it means anything up to three years; but I must say the episcopal library at Colchester isn't very strong in criminal law. It seems to deal chiefly with vegetarianism and drunkenness.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*brushing all this aside*]. I may be dull, Mr. —

Frampington. Frampington.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But I don't yet understand why you've come here.

Flora. Mr. Frampington was going to explain how it was the police-station was so inhospitable.

Frampington. The Inspector wouldn't believe my story. He thought I was a practical joker.

Flora. And don't you think you are?

Frampington [*judicially*]. Depends how one looks at it. I feel sure I should have been more convincing if I hadn't changed my clothes. But the Bishop insisted on me doing that, and so I put on the only suit I had. And then I found I'd chosen a bad night. Owing to these vivisection riots, they were doing a big business in medical students at Vine Street. In fact, my suspicion is that all their cells were engaged. And there's another thing — I don't think I ought to have gone to Vine Street. Vine Street specialises in what you may call West End cases — pocket-picking, confidence tricks, murder, aristocratic inebriety, and so on. It runs in a groove. But then Vine Street was the only police-station that I was personally

acquainted with — a youthful souvenir of Boatrace night — and so I went there. It was a mistake.

Mrs. R. Haslam. I'm afraid you didn't insist.

Framlington. Yes. I did. I insisted so much that at last the Inspector got cross and said that if I didn't clear he *should* lock me up.

Mrs. R. Haslam. And wasn't that enough for you, my man?

Framlington [*starting slightly at the appellation*]. It was too much. I naturally wanted to be locked up for the right thing. The truth is the Inspector thought I was drunk — probably because I was so calm. One of the constables said I — er — smelt of drink.

Mrs. R. Haslam. And did you?

Framlington. Certainly not. Beyond half-a-pint of Bordeaux at the Ritz, I assure you I had had nothing whatever.

Flora. The Ritz?

Framlington. Why not, madam?

Flora. As you say, why not!

Framlington. It was handy for Vine Street, and this being my last night of freedom, you see — As a novelist, Mrs. Haslam, you will understand I had a natural desire to do myself well.

Mrs. R. Haslam. The only thing I understand is that you seem to have come here for the pleasure of hearing yourself talk.

Framlington [*rising simply*]. I beg your pardon. I came here to ask the Bishop to accom-

pany me to the police-station as corroborative evidence. When your servant told me he wasn't here, the idea occurred to me that perhaps some member of your family wouldn't mind going with me — just to identify me.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Charlie, you'd better go on your way to the office.

Charles. That's all very well, but ——

Frampington. It would be very good of you. But I really think we ought to try another police-station. Bow Street would be better — more classical — if it isn't too much off your beat.

Flora. Why don't you go to Liverpool Street?

Frampington. But Liverpool Street is not a police-station.

Flora. No. But it's a railway station. Colchester isn't the only place it leads to. There's Harwich, for instance, the continent ——
[*Smiles.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam [*in a low voice*]. Really, Flora! Christianity can be carried too far.

Frampington [*to Flora*]. I should be caught. And, honestly, I prefer the new experience which lies before me. It can't last long. And new experiences are my hobby.

Flora. But this is serious. You mayn't get a long sentence, but when you're discharged from prison you'll be a social outcast.

Frampington. Oh, no, I shan't. In two years time I come into twenty thousand pounds.

Flora. I see.

Frampington [*to Charles*]. May I count on your help? [*Bowing adieu to Mrs. R. Haslam.*] *Madam.* [*To Flora.*] Mrs. Lloyd, your sympathy is very remarkable, and I appreciate it. Please accept my sincerest apologies for any temporary inconvenience I may have caused you. I assure you, this morning I didn't realise until afterwards the awful seriousness of what I'd done.

Flora. Neither did I. Well, good luck! [*Shakes hands with him to the deep astonishment of Mrs. Reach Haslam. Frampington goes towards door. Charles uncertainly goes in the same direction, then stops.*]

Charles [*to Frampington*]. Just wait in the hall a moment, will you?

Frampington. Certainly. [*Exit back.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam [*turning to Flora*]. Well, it's not often that I'm left speechless —

Charles. Look here, mater. You send me off with this lunatic, but it doesn't seem to have occurred to you that I've had no dinner. I haven't even had time to wash.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*before he has finished*]. Why did you shake hands with him, dear? You were almost effusive.

Flora. I felt almost effusive.

Charles. But don't you think he's off his nut?

Flora. Whatever he is, he's saved me from something that's rather awful to think about.

Mrs. R. Haslam. He's what?

Flora. I may as well tell you now — Cedric and I aren't going to get married to-morrow.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Not going to — [*stops*]. But you've just arranged with the Bishop!

Flora. I know. But that was simply my cowardice. The truth is I hadn't the heart to tell him. I felt that we could express ourselves more comfortably in a telegram than by word of mouth.

Mrs. R. Haslam. *We!* But — but what's wrong with to-morrow, Flora?

Flora. Nothing. It's no worse than any other day. Only we aren't going to get married at all.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But you *are* married — practically. I mean —

Flora [*shakes her head*]. Not even theoretically.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*with a certain dignified appeal*]. Flora, I'm not as young as you are. I'm a hard working woman. My work is terribly in arrear. But I've never broken a contract yet, and I must finish to-night that article of mine for "Harper's" on "A Remedy for the Decline of the Birthrate in London Society." The subject is delicate for a popular magazine, and I need to have my mind free. May I beg you to tell me exactly what you mean, without being too witty?

Flora. I'm really very sorry. Very sorry. If I'm witty, I honestly assure you it's an oversight. All I can tell you is that Cedric and I have had

an extremely serious difference of opinion, on a vital matter, and there's no hope of our views being reconciled, and so we aren't going to get married.

Charles. Not really!

Flora. Yes.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*half to herself*]. And this is all you can find to do, to help me with my article! [*To Flora.*] I suppose I must imitate your calmness.

Flora [*winningly*]. Oh! please do.

Mrs. R. Haslam. When did you and Cedric settle this?

Flora. We haven't settled it. Have we had a moment alone together since we left Pixton? *I've* settled it. One person can settle these things.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Do you mean to say that Cedric doesn't know what you're telling me?

Flora. Not unless he's listening behind the door. I inform you before anyone.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Of course father and I both noticed that you were far from being yourselves. But we put it down to the shock and disappointment.

Flora. To the Frampington accident? Oh, no! A Frampington accident might happen to any unmarried couple. I'm afraid our gloom was caused by nothing but a terrible fear.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Terrible fear?

Flora. Terrible fear lest neither of us would

have the audacity to profit by Mr. Frampington's revelation.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Audacity! Your audacity astounds me.

Flora. Yes, it rather startles even me. Now, will you mind telling Cedric?

Mrs. R. Haslam. I! [*Looks at her. Then exit, L.*]

Flora. Are you also struck dumb?

Charles. I suppose the kick-up was about — Snowdon versus honeymoon.

Flora. Charlie, how penetrating you are, really! And you put it in a nutshell.

Charles. Well, when we burst into that hotel this morning, I could have sworn something was wrong. Don't you remember I enquired what was the matter? And just now when I was asking Rick what he meant to do, it didn't want any very powerful penetration to see that there must have been a hades of a rumpus between him and you.

Flora [*puzzlingly*]. Oh! Didn't it? And what's your opinion? Do you think Snowdon ought to win?

Charles. Well, it's fiendishly important.

Flora. I know. But don't you think a honeymoon's somehow more important?

Charles. Some honeymoons might be.

Flora. What should you have done in Cedric's place?

Charles. But look here, Flo, he *has* given way, you know.

Flora. Yes, but against his judgment.

Charles. Well, he couldn't help that.

Flora. You're wrong, Charlie.

Charles. Am I?

Flora. Couldn't help it? If Cedric can't control his judgment better than that, in a serious matter, at the very start of the marriage, so much the worse for him and for me.

Charles. Perhaps so.

Flora. Charlie, there are some things that you understand better than Cedric.

Charles. That's what I always say, but no one believes me.

Flora. It's true. Do you know I'm simply shaking?

Charles. Fright? [*Flora nods.*] I can believe you are, but nobody'd guess it. [*Half-enter Cedric, L.*]

Cedric [*stopping at half-opened door. To somebody outside the room.*]. What's that you say? [*Exit again, leaving door ajar.*]

Flora. You'd better go. Don't forget the imitation curate's waiting for you.

Charles. Frizzle the imitation curate.

Flora. You'll be in the way here — don't you see?

Charles. But you're sending me off just at

the interesting part. And you'll all be gone to bed before I get back from the office.

Flora. Yes, but I hope we shall all still be alive to-morrow. Now — there's a dear, before Cedric comes.

Charles. But — is it really serious? [*Flora nods.*] Then we shan't have to go to Colchester to-morrow? [*Flora shakes her head.*] Nor any other day? [*Flora shakes her head. Charles moves reluctantly towards the door.*] Well, I can't realise it, and that's flat. I say —

Flora. Yes?

Charles. Would you mind telling father or mother to see that my supper is set for me in the garden to-night? And something solid, too! [*Enter Cedric.*]

Flora. I will. [*Exit Charles, back.*]

Flora. I see your mother's told you. Well, what can I say to you?

Cedric [*sitting down*]. You might congratulate me on the way I'm keeping calm under stress.

Flora. But why do you come in like this and look at me like this?

Cedric. Idle curiosity! Having received the news from the mater, I was absurdly curious to hear any remarks you might have to make to me. So I came in — like this.

Flora. Cedric, I did it the best way I could. I thought I would imitate the blandness of the

sham curate. You haven't seen him to-night, but I may tell you he carries blandness further than it has ever been carried before. . . . I was afraid if I didn't do it at once it might never be done. I could see the time going on and going on, and me preparing to do this thing in a nice, kind, tactful, proper way, exactly as it should be done — and never doing it — never beginning to do it! And at last finding myself at Colchester to-morrow, and hypnotised by your mother and the Bishop. Cedric, I'm sure it's a mistake to *prepare* to do a thing like this, leading up to it, and so on. The best plan is to let it go off with a frightful *bang*, anyhow, as I've done! Then the worst happens at the start instead of at the finish.

Cedric. I quite see the argument.

Flora [*with a nod of the head towards the door, L.*]. You've told her the reason?

Cedric. She'd half guessed it. I made it seem as plausible as I could, in my taciturn way. But you know it would need a course of lectures to explain it properly.

Flora. I suppose I ought to depart hence. Where is your mother now?

Cedric. She's briefly stating the facts to the head of the family.

Flora. Cedric, don't you feel as if I'd lifted an enormous weight off your chest? Candidly!

Cedric. No; but I feel as if we'd been sitting all day in a stuffy railway carriage with a window

that wouldn't open, and there'd been a collision that had pitched us clean through it. I've got oxygen, but I'm dashed if I can feel my legs.

Flora. My dear Cedric, if you were seriously injured you couldn't talk like that. [*Enter, L., during the last words, Mrs. Reach Haslam and Mr. Reach Haslam, very solemn.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Has Charlie gone?

Flora. Yes. By the way, he wants his supper set in the garden — he asked me to tell you.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Thank you.

Flora. Something solid, he said.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*sitting down*]. Cedric, I wish your father to hear for himself exactly what the situation is. I naturally turn to him and leave everything to him. . . . Now, father.

Mr. R. Haslam. So far as I've gathered, there seems to be some slight difficulty as to dates. To-day's the 20th — to-morrow will be the 21st [*looking at date calendar*]. Yes, the 21st. Flora thinks the honeymoon ought to end on the 21st *prox.*, whereas Cedric thinks the honeymoon ought to end in about ten days' time, say 1st *prox.* The difference of opinion [*ironical stress*] on this highly important matter, this fundamental matter, is final. Hence Flora has absolutely decided to break off the marriage.

Flora. That's it.

Mr. R. Haslam. Nothing could be simpler.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Flora, how can you sit there

and trifle with our deepest feelings, in this utterly cynical manner?

Flora [persuasively]. I hope we aren't going to converse as if we were characters in a powerful novel of modern society. This is real life, you know, let's talk as if we were real people — do you mind?

Mrs. R. Haslam. Personally, I am not aware of being unreal. But *you* seem to be unaware that you are playing with tragic things.

Flora. As I told Cedric in the first act ——

Mrs. R. Haslam [staggered beyond measure].
In the first act!

Flora. My dear. I'm only trying to fall in with your wish to turn this affair into a tragedy. If it is a tragedy, the first act occurred this morning. As I told Cedric this morning, we've stumbled across a question of vital principle. Is our marriage to be the most important thing in our lives, or isn't it? If it is, then nothing less than an earthquake could possibly disturb the honeymoon, because I suppose you'll admit the honeymoon is the most urgent part of matrimony. If our marriage is *not* to be the most important thing in our lives — all right! That's a point of view that I can understand; only — I don't want to get married. And I won't! [*Pause.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Cedric, why don't you speak?

Cedric. Nothing to say.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Your silence is excessive.

Flora [*still persuasively*]. We solemnly arrange our honeymoon. Then Cedric happens to see a newspaper and he as good as says, "Here's something more important than our honeymoon. Our honeymoon must give way to this." And after all, this terrific something is nothing whatever but a purely business matter — something to do with the works.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Something to do with England, with Cedric's career, with Cedric's duty.

Flora [*turning to Mr. Reach Haslam*]. Supposing Cedric one day said he couldn't attend his father's funeral because his career called him elsewhere, because England wanted him, what should you say?

Mr. R. Haslam. I probably shouldn't open my mouth.

Mrs. R. Haslam. A funeral is different —

Flora. It is. But I can't help thinking that if circumstances oughtn't to prevent a man from going to a funeral, they oughtn't to prevent him from going to his own honeymoon.

Cedric. I hope you won't lose sight of the fact that I gave way to you absolutely about five hours ago.

Mr. R. Haslam. That's the trouble.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Father!

Mr. R. Haslam. Yes, that's the trouble, because his giving way to her is a proof that he didn't share her views. What *Flora* objects to in

Cedric is not what he does, but what he thinks. She seems to me to have no use for free-thinking in a husband.

Flora. I won't argue any further.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But why not? Surely that is unreasonable.

Flora. Because in an argument I always begin rather well, but in the end I'm apt to get beaten. So I just stop, especially when I know I'm right. I'm a short distance woman. All I say is — can you imagine me — *me*, running off to Ostend with a man who had sacrificed his career, and Snowdon, and all England, unwillingly, in order to go . . . what gay little suppers we should have together!

Mrs. R. Haslam. One day, perhaps when it's too late, you'll realise that a wife's first duty, and therefore her greatest joy, is to help her husband. I know *I* realised it, at once. When I was married, Reach was only earning three hundred a year; he was a solicitor's managing clerk — weren't you, father? I said to myself that I ought to try to help him, and so I began to write. And as a wife, I've been doing my best to help him ever since. After ten years I thought it advisable for him to give up the law. How much did I pay income-tax on last year, dear?

Mr. R. Haslam. Nineteen thousand four hundred pounds.

Mrs. R. Haslam. I don't boast, but you see what comes of trying to do one's wifely duty!

Flora. Some women can do nothing but earn money. [*Cedric begins playing mechanically with an object on the table*]. I can only spend it. Two different talents! If I had a hundred pounds to throw away at this moment, I know what I should spend it on — [*A pause. She looks round; exerting all her wayward charm.*] Come, why doesn't some one ask me what I should spend it on?

Mrs. R. Haslam [*gloomily perfunctory*]. What should you spend it on?

Flora. I should erect a statue to Mr. Frampington. It would be a good thing if there were a few more Frampingtons about, just to give people who've got as far as the vestry a chance of reconsidering their position.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Upon my word, *Flora* [*cuttingly*], one would say, from your sparkling wit, that you were quite in high spirits over the situation.

Flora. Well, my dear, in one way I could cry my eyes out, but in another I *am* rather uplifted when I think of what Mr. Frampington has saved us from.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Saved you from! [*Very courteously and quietly.*] Really, I should have thought that any woman would have been more than a little flattered at the prospect of marrying into the Haslam family, of being the wife of Cedric. No house in London is more sought after than

ours. It isn't too much to say that Cedric is now one of the most celebrated men in England ——

Cedric [*crossly*]. Look here, mater ——
[*He keeps his head down; he is still playing with the object on the table.*]

Mr. R. Haslam [*sharply*]. Cedric! [*Mrs. Reach Haslam looks at her husband, as if expecting him majestically to reprove his son.*] I wish you'd play with something else for a change.

Mrs. R. Haslam. I speak kindly, but I speak plainly, and I'm not ashamed of doing so. I say one of the most celebrated men in England. Indeed, it wouldn't surprise me to learn that among the masses of the people Cedric is better known even than I am myself.

Cedric. Mater, I'm off!

Mr. R. Haslam [*severely to him*]. You'll kindly stay where you are. There are times when one ought to be frank. [*Still very courteously and quietly to Flora.*] You know I was not at first altogether in favour of this marriage — not what could be described as uncontrollably enthusiastic about it. I have appreciated your excellent qualities, but ——

Flora [*smiling*]. Please don't expose me. Comfort yourself with the thought of what Mr. Frampington has saved *you* from. [*Mr. Reach Haslam rises softly and goes towards door, back.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Where are you going, father?

Mr. R. Haslam. I thought I'd just make sure about Charlie's supper, before it slipped my memory. [*Exit back.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam [*turning to Flora again, pained*]. You are forgetting the terrible scandal that will ensue if you persist in your present course, dear Flora. The honeymoon actually begun! and then — this bombshell! How shall we break it to the Bishop? How can I ever look the Bishop in the face again! How can I ever look anybody in the face again? . . . To-day of all days, when my new book has just come out! And with my article to finish, on the decline of the birthrate among the well-to-do classes! . . . How *can* we explain to people that the marriage is broken off when there's certain to be an account of the wedding in every paper to-morrow morning?

Flora. That, at any rate, isn't my fault. By-the-way, how *did* that paragraph get into the "Piccadilly Gazette"? [*Mischievously.*] I suppose it must have slipped in while you were looking the other way.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*with controlled acerbity*]. When you begin to figure prominently in the life of your country, Flora, you'll understand, perhaps, a little better than you do now that newspaper reporters, whatever their sex, simply will not be denied. They reside on the doorstep. One cannot be rude. At least I can't.

Flora. I hope I never shall figure prominently

in the life of my country. But I want to figure prominently in the life of my husband.

Mrs. R. Haslam. The newspapers —

Cedric. Excuse me, mater, but isn't this right off the point?

Mrs. R. Haslam [*to herself*]. And I was looking forward to a quiet half hour with my press-cuttings! [*Silence. Enter Mr. Reach Haslam cautiously, back.*]

Mr. R. Haslam [*mildly cheerful*]. Well, where have you got to?

Flora. I think we're gradually working back again to the importance of marriage in the life of the husband.

Mr. R. Haslam. That's better! That's better. [*Sits.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Flora, you'll pardon me offering my opinion, as an experienced student of human nature, but when you say "the importance of marriage," I think you really mean your own individual importance. Personal vanity is very misleading.

Flora. Oh! It is.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Your attitude might be more defensible if you were a different *kind* of woman. I don't say it would be more defensible, but it might be.

Cedric. Oh, look here, mater —

Mrs. R. Haslam. Cedric, may I venture to converse in my own study?

Flora [to *Cedric*]. Don't you understand that this is not your act? [*Rising.*] How a different kind of a woman?

Mrs. R. Haslam [*quietly courteous*]. I mean, if you brought more to the marriage.

Flora. Money? I'm not rich, but you see I'm rich enough to despise ten thousand pounds.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*protesting*]. *Flora*! Please don't mention such a thing! Have *I* mentioned it? I think we Haslams are as capable as anybody of despising ten thousand pounds. [*Very kindly.*] No, I mean, if you had more to show in the way of — shall I say? — striking personal talent. You can have no rôle except that of wife, purely social and domestic. And yet your attitude seems somehow to claim the privileges of a — a great singer, or a great pianist, or —

Flora. A great novelist?

Mrs. R. Haslam [*imperturbable*]. No, no. I was thinking more of public performers. . . . Genius. . . . If you had genius, talents. Mind, I'm not blaming you for not having them. I make no reflection whatever. . . . Of course you are good, I hope, and you're beautiful.

Flora. So they say.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But beauty is a mere gift — from heaven.

Flora. My dear, what's the difference between a talent, and a gift from heaven? I remember not very long since you were really quite annoyed

because the "Saturday Review," I think it was, referred to you as "Mrs. Reach Haslam, the talented novelist." Whereas you are constantly being called the "gifted novelist," and you like it. [*She begins to sit down.*]

Mr. R. Haslam. Pardon me. "Like" is too strong a word. My wife prefers to be mentioned as "Mrs. Reach Haslam," simply — don't you, dear? One doesn't expect to read in the papers "Mr. Balfour, the talented statesman," "Lord Northcliffe, the talented statesman." One expects only "Mr. Balfour," "Lord Northcliffe."

Mrs. R. Haslam [*waving him graciously into silence. To Flora*]. I willingly admit, dear, that in its origin a talent — like mine, if you insist — is a gift from heaven. But what years of study are necessary to perfect it! Whereas mere beauty, charm —

Flora [*having sat down, and finally arranged her fan and shawl, etc.*]. It's taken me at least seven years of intense study to learn to sit down like that — and in another two years I shall do it even better. [*With a delightful smile.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam [*graciously lenient*]. But seriously —

Flora. Seriously? [*Stopping, in a different tone.*] My dear, did the Bishop say anything when I left the room?

Mrs. R. Haslam. Say anything! About what?

Flora. About me.

Mr. R. Haslam. He remarked that you were a ravishing creature.

Flora. Jokingly?

Mr. R. Haslam. No. He was quite serious.

Flora. That's just it. If it was only frivolous, empty-headed boys who were serious about it, but it isn't. The most high-minded, middle-aged men are serious about it. Why, even chauffeurs and policemen are serious about it. There must be *something* in it. Wherever I go people are more serious about me than about anybody else — even if singers and pianists happen to be present. If I arrive late at the theatres I'm the play for at least two minutes. And I assure you in the streets it often occurs that men I don't know hurry after me very seriously about it — even if I'm veiled. And yet you and I have the same dressmaker! It's always been like that — ever since my first marriage. And it's getting more and more marked. I don't mind telling you, my dear, that my own secret view of my importance is perhaps as modest as yours is of yours — but what can you and I do against the universal opinion? I've begun to bow before the storm. It's the wisest course. You talk about what I bring to the marriage [*proudly*]. I bring to the marriage the gift of heaven, cultivated by the labour of a lifetime, and, as to its value, there's only one estimate, except yours [*with a catch in her voice*] — and Cedric's! Cedric puts an aeroplane higher.

Cedric. I beg your pardon —

Flora [with emotion]. Yes, you do! Yes, you do! When there came a conflict between my honeymoon and your aeroplane, you decided instantly against the honeymoon, before I'd even been asked! You didn't even consult me.

Cedric. Aeroplane! Aeroplane! You keep on saying aeroplane, but —

Flora [calmer]. Listen. I know you've given way. I know you've offered not to sacrifice the honeymoon, but don't you really think still in your own mind that the honeymoon *ought* to be sacrificed? [*Cedric does not answer — pause.*] You know perfectly well it's a relief to you that I've cried off! Come, honestly now?

Mr. R. Haslam [warningly, under his breath]. Not too honestly.

Cedric [quietly]. Yes, I *do* think part of the honeymoon ought to be sacrificed. And I never dreamed that you would think otherwise. It's a difference of opinion that simply staggers me. It doesn't only stagger me — it frightens me. It makes one reflect, you know.

Flora. Then you *are* relieved? You're grateful.

Cedric [moved and stammering]. I ought to be. Of course you're the only person who could cry off.

Flora. What do you mean?

Cedric. Some things a man can't do.

Flora. Do you sit there and say that if I hadn't cut the knot, you'd have gone on, and you'd have let me go on, with a marriage you didn't believe in? Because you're a man, and there are some things a man can't do! Can't a man show as much pluck as a woman? That *does* settle it! [*Controlling herself.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Flora, you'll regret you've thrown Cedric over. You'll certainly want to come back to him.

Flora [*disdainfully*]. Shall I! [*Politely.*]
Good-night, Mrs. Haslam.

Mrs. R. Haslam. But where are you going?

Flora. I don't know. How can I stay here? My official connection with this house is ended. I shall go to a hotel. Good-night. So many thanks!

Mrs. R. Haslam [*rising and going to her; firmly*]. I'm sure you'll oblige me by not scandalising the servants. You can choose a hotel to-morrow morning. I'll go with you to your room, if I may. All your trunks will be up there by this time. [*Exeunt Flora, submissive, and Mrs. Reach Haslam, back. Mr. Reach Haslam slowly prepares for work at desk.*]

Cedric. I'm off into the garden. [*Pulls out his cigarette case. Exit, L.*]

Mr. R. Haslam [*aside as Cedric goes*]. Nin-compoop! [*Enter Mrs. Reach Haslam.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Dear, before I go on with

that article, I should like to make a few notes on Flora's demeanour, while the thing's fresh in my mind. One never knows when that kind of stuff won't come in useful.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Where's the boy?

Mr. R. Haslam. In the garden. [*Half to himself.*] Of all places!

Mrs. R. Haslam [*collecting her thoughts and beginning to dictate*]. "Essentially hysterical in a crisis, but does not pull a face before weeping, probably owing to advice from toilette specialist." Yes, full stop.

[*Curtain.*]

ACT III

SCENE.— *Garden of the Reach Haslam's house in Palace Gardens. House front to the left. At the back, shrubberies and trees. In centre, an arbour or pergola, with the open side to the footlights. Under the shelter of this a table, with remains of a meal.*

TIME.— *Next morning 4 a. m. Magnificent sunrise.*

Cedric is sitting at the table having finished eating. He is still in evening dress, and dishevelled. [Enter Charles through shrubberies from back. He wears the same costume as in previous act, with hat, stick, etc.]

Cedric. Hello?

Charles. So you're here, are you?

Cedric [*wiping his mouth*]. I am.

Charles. Well, what's happened?

Cedric. What do you mean?

Charles. What do I mean? You and Flora, of course!

Cedric. Nothing more.

Charles. Then is it off?

Cedric [*with a nervous laugh*]. Right bang off! [*Pause.*]

Charles. You look as if you'd been up all night.

Cedric [*nods*]. What time is it? My watch has stopped.

Charles. About four. I'm a trifle late. [*Sits down to table.*] Well, my boy, I've got a bit of news for you. I don't know whether it'll influence you, but —— [*startled*]. Look here, have you been eating my supper?

Cedric. Was it for you?

Charles. I must say this really is a bit too thick!

Cedric. How should I know it was for you?

Charles. Of course you knew!

Cedric. It was all laid here. The fact is, I went off to sleep. I must have slept solid for about four hours. When I woke up just now, I was as hungry as a dog, so I just —— I never thought ——

Charles. Never thought be damned!

Cedric. Awfully sorry. Here's some bread. What's this news?

Charles [*taking bread*]. What's the good of being sorry? It was entirely on account of you I had no tea yesterday and no dinner either, and now I'm dashed if you haven't gone and eaten my supper too!

Cedric. What's this news?

Charles [*eating*]. If I hadn't had some sultana at the office I don't know what I should have done. I've a good mind not to tell you! [*Tak-*

ing paper from his pocket.] Here! This is a second edition, just off the machines [opening paper]. Oh, curse! Mind the ink! [Looking at his hands, after giving paper to Cedric, who examines it.] There you are! [indicating a paragraph in the paper. Cedric reads, then rises.]

Cedric [after reflection]. See here, boy. You just go to bed out of the way and don't ever let on that you've shown me this paper or even knew what there was in it. Do you hear? [Putting paper in his pocket.]

Charles. I hear. But why?

Cedric. Never mind why.

Charles. But the newsagent will deliver the mater's copy here at eight o'clock, and by half-past eight you may bet everybody in the place —

Cedric. I'm going to do something long before eight o'clock.

Charles. What are you going to do?

*Cedric. I'm going to see Flora, and tell her I've altered my view completely. If she knew I'd seen the paper she'd be bound to think I'd only come round because of *that*, and she wouldn't listen to me — don't you see, idiot?*

Charles. I see. But haven't you altered your view because of that?

Cedric [coldly]. What's that got to do with you? The point is that at any rate I can go honeymooning now with a free mind. That's the point.

Charles. And do you reckon all this'll be on the straight?

Cedric. I don't care whether it's on the straight or not. [*Savagely.*] *I've got to have that woman* — confound her! and I'm going to.

Charles. Where is she?

Cedric. She's in the spare room next to the mater's.

Charles. And how do you intend to get at her?

Cedric. I'm going to call her, and ask her to dress and come down at once. Then I shall talk to her, here. With a bit of luck I may be off with her and on the way to Colchester at six o'clock. Is there plenty of petrol in the stable?

Charles. Yes. I say — it's not *right*, you know!

Cedric. Shut up. [*Going.*] Did Fisher clean the car last night?

Charles. How do I know? He ought to have done. I say —

Cedric [*stopping*]. Well?

Charles. I suppose you don't want any advice from me?

Cedric. No. [*Turns and stops again.*] What?

Charles. I was only going to say that you'd better change those clothes and make yourself look less of an absolute waster.

Cedric. Well, of course! I expect I can dress quicker than she can, can't I? I've thought of all

that. [*He turns finally to leave. Enter Flora from house, meeting him. She is fully dressed in morning street attire, and carries a handbag.*]

Flora [*staggered*]. Good morning!

Cedric [*staggered*]. Good morning!

Charles. Hello, Flo! What's the meaning of this?

Flora. Couldn't sleep.

Cedric [*hastily and nervously*]. I shall be down in two jiffs. [*Aside to Charles.*] See you don't let her go. [*Exit into house.*]

Flora. I guessed you'd be having your supper just about now. That's why I came down here.

Charles [*pleased*]. That's fine. Only I'm not having my supper. Cedric's eaten it all. He's been out here all night, and he's eaten it all — except this [*showing bread*].

Flora. My poor boy! But here's a couple of bananas. Have you ever tried banana sandwiches?

Charles. No. Are they any good?

Flora. Are they any good! Never had a banana sandwich! Shall I make you some?

Charles. I wish you would. [*Silence, while she sets about sandwiches.*]

Flora. Well, how long shall I have to wait?

Charles. Wait?

Flora. To hear what happened to Mr. Frampington, of course. Did they take him in at Bow Street?

Charles. Oh, yes.

Flora. Do you know — I'm rather sorry. Somehow I should have liked him to get clear away. Here! [*Gives him a sandwich, which he eats. Then solemnly.*] Now, Charlie, I'm going. I want to be gone before anybody's up.

Charles. What occurred last night?

Flora. Oh! terrific scenes! terrific scenes! and I really can't face your mother this morning at breakfast. I couldn't do it. And it's quite unnecessary. So I'm going to the Great Western Hotel. I shall pretend I've arrived by a night train. And I want you to see that my trunks are brought there later. Here! [*Gives him another sandwich.*]

Charles. All serene! Thanks! [*After thought.*] I say — I rather like Frampington, too.

Flora. Why?

Charles. I don't know. It's due to him — somehow — I feel like you feel. . . . I say, Flora, has it ever occurred to you that I'm a mere cipher in this house?

Flora. Really?

Charles. I'm nobody. I'm pitched about everywhere.

Flora. You don't mean — my trunks?

Charles. Not a bit. Of course I don't. I mean the way they treat me. Here Cedric's a perfect duke, in his own line. But will he have me on the works? Not much. Says I must strike out

for myself, and all sorts of tommyrot. And in the end I'm set to night-work like a blooming nigger. People might think we were hard up for five quid a week, instead of simply rolling in coin — rolling in it! Why shouldn't I go round the world or something! I'm only twenty-two.

Flora. That all?

Charles. I go out and work all night. Then I come home and discover Cedric couldn't find anything better to do than eat my supper. Five servants in this house. But do you suppose there'd have been the least chance of me getting anything to eat before eight o'clock, at the earliest, if you hadn't invented these sandwiches? Not much! Thanks! [*Takes two more.*] But that's not what I meant. What I really meant was — who introduced my people to you? I did. I knew you at the Baths Club six months before his lordship Cedric and the mater kindly invited themselves to have tea with me there, and then I didn't count any more! Cedric simply shovelled me up and chucked me into a corner. In less than twenty-four hours he was in love with you. But did he ask my permission? Did he think about me for one instant? Not much! The fact is, they simply make use of me . . . and so — I rather like Frampington. Understand?

Flora. Yes.

Charles. Of course, I'm sorry about what's happened — as far as you are concerned. But as

far as Cedric's concerned, I can't help thinking it serves him jolly well right. Cedric's too cocksure — in everything.

Flora. That's quite true.

Charles [*hesitating*]. Yes.

Flora. What else have you got on your mind?

Charles. Well, I don't know if I ought to tell you.

Flora. Certainly you ought to tell me.

Charles. You think so?

Flora. Unless, of course, you agree with all the things your dear mother's been saying to me.

Charles. It's about Klopstock.

Flora. About Klopstock?

Charles. He's had an accident.

Flora. What?

Charles. Broken his leg.

Flora. How? Came down too quickly?

Charles. No. Driving to his hotel last night his motor ran into a statue of Bismarck, and he was thrown out.

Flora. Motor cars are really too dangerous. I wonder any aviator cares to trust himself to them.

Charles [*admiringly*]. Now it's very funny. I often want to say things like that, only I can never think of them. Cedric — he can come out with them sometimes, and so can the dad. But you're the only woman I ever struck that could.

Flora. Charlie, you're a dear. I suppose he'll be laid up for five or six weeks.

Charles. Who? Klopstock? You bet. You see what it means?

Flora. Quite. What I don't see is why you should have hesitated to tell me about it. I suppose you've told Cedric?

Charles. Yes. I brought an early copy of the paper with it in.

Flora. Where is it?

Charles. Cedric's cleared off with it.

Flora. Well, if Cedric knows, why shouldn't I?

Charles. Ask me another! Look here, I'm giving the show away, but I've got my conscience to think of. This is a serious matter. I mean — really serious! I don't like it, but it's my duty to warn you.

Flora. Well?

Charles. Cedric told me I wasn't to say a word. He said I wasn't to let on that I'd told *him*.

Flora. And did you promise?

Charles. I should think I didn't. Not me!

Flora. Had Cedric been out here all *night*?

Charles. Yes. Told me he slept like a top in that chair, then woke up and ate my supper.

Flora. But why should he want you not to say anything about Klopstock? [*Enter Cedric, in a lounge suit, somewhat awry, with a hat. Flora continues in the same tone to Charles.*] Here, have this last one [*offering him another sandwich. To Cedric*]. It appears you've been eating what

doesn't belong to you. So I've done my best with bananas and stale bread to fill the breach.

Charles [nervous]. You've forgotten your hair, my boy.

Cedric [with a gesture; low to Charles]. Hook it! [*He repeats the gesture. Exit Charles unwillingly, into house.*]

Flora [primly]. I'm just going. I meant to leave before any of you were up. I thought that would be the wisest thing to do. But Charles begged me to stop and look after him a bit.

Cedric. What's he been entertaining you with?

Flora. Oh! his grievances. They're rather real, you know.

Cedric. Do you know, when I went in just now I was meaning to knock at your door and ask you to get up at once. Curious thing, that you should have been coming downstairs at that very moment!

Flora. Why this desire to begin the day so early?

Cedric. Look here, Flora, let's go, now! Fisher won't be up, but the car's cleaned and there's plenty of petrol. Come on. Just you and I.

Flora [innocently]. Where?

Cedric. Colchester. I can wake the Bishop and tell him we want the job done at eight o'clock instead of twelve. Any old verger and charwoman will do for witnesses. The thing will be all over before the mater's out of bed. We can tele-

phone to 'em from Colchester with the pleasing news. [*Pause. As Flora says nothing, he continues, rather less confidently.*] It'll give 'em an appetite for breakfast.

Flora [*ironically*]. Any other details?

Cedric [*with rough persuasiveness*]. Come on!

Flora [*ironically*]. Then you've decided that we are to get married, after all?

Cedric. Well, a marriage can't be broken off like — like this! It's unthinkable. What would any unprejudiced outsider say, if he was asked? He'd say we were off our blooming heads. The thing simply won't bear examination. [*Moves towards her*]. Come —

Flora. And I'm to be carried by storm? . . . Great saving of argument!

Cedric. Now listen —

Flora. Well?

Cedric. Will you talk man to man? Straight?

Flora. As one honest Injun to another!

Cedric [*picking up a dish off the table*]. If you make one more joke, I'll smash every darned bit of crockery on this table. [*Gesture of destruction.*]

Flora [*coldly*]. Now if I agree to listen quietly and talk reasonably, it mustn't be understood that I'm open to argument. [*Sits down.*]

Cedric. All right, all right!

Flora. Because I'm not. I'm not. I'm not. The thing that's — that's really upset our apple-

cart may seem perfectly childish to the unprejudiced outsider. But I don't propose to consult the unprejudiced outsider. Might as well take the case before a jury and engage a couple of K.C.'s. You know as well as I know that it isn't perfectly childish. It isn't childish at all. It's fundamental. We've been unlucky. But then in another sense we've been lucky. We're free. We aren't tied, thank Heaven. Man to man, Cedric, it would be too much humiliation — yes, humiliation — for me to marry anybody that looks on marriage as you look on it. And as it's just as impossible for you to change your opinion as it is for me to change mine, we shan't exactly go down to Colchester this morning. . . . More's the pity.

Cedric. Well, I *have* changed my opinion. So let's go.

Flora. You've changed your opinion? How have you changed your opinion?

Cedric. I've sat there all this blessed night thinking it over.

Flora. Really?

Cedric. Yes. Do you suppose I could sleep any more than you could? What do you take me for? The more I thought it over, the more I saw I'd been mistaken. Now — half a minute! I can't honestly blame myself, you know. And so I won't pretend to — especially as we're talking straight. I told you what I felt, right out, and

then I offered to give way. I couldn't do anything else. Well, you wouldn't have that. Mind you, I think you were quite right in refusing to let me give way against my better judgment. I admire you for that even more than I did. But I don't give way now against my judgment — I give way with it.

Flora. But how has your judgment altered? Why?

Cedric. I don't know. How *do* people's judgments alter? I gradually saw the force of what you'd said. *Of course* a man's marriage must come in front of everything else! *Of course* the idea of letting any business matter interfere with the honeymoon is monstrous! I cannot imagine how it was I couldn't see that yesterday. The only explanation is that up to yesterday I'd never lived for anything except my job. Force of habit! One has to get a bit used to a new state of affairs. I suppose it was the sudden shock of the news that sent me a bit off the track. Look here, Flora, you don't want me to go on in this strain. You don't want me to grovel. I'm not the grovelling sort . . . I was mistaken.

Flora [in a new quiet tone]. Cedric, what happened in your mother's study after I went upstairs last night?

Cedric. Nothing whatever. I cleared out instantly afterwards. I've been here ever since, and I haven't spoken to a soul except Charlie. Why?

Flora. Nothing.

Cedric. But why do you say "Nothing" like that?

Flora. Cedric, I was just wondering how this conversation of yours really did come about. It occurred to me that perhaps something might have happened — in business —

Cedric [*nervous*]. How — "something" — in business?

Flora. Something — I don't know — something that would leave you free after all for a full month, so that in being converted you wouldn't have to sacrifice anything at all.

Cedric. But how could anything have happened?

Flora. I don't know, but with that telephone so handy in your mother's study — All manner of things happen nowadays over the telephone — especially in the middle of the night.

Cedric [*relieved. Affecting a cheerful irony*]. What notions she does get into her head! My dear girl, nothing whatever has happened — so far as I know. Of course nothing *could*. My conversion, as you call it, is due simply and solely to my thinking things over.

Flora. Honour bright?

Cedric [*firmly*]. Certainly! . . . Then you really imagined I was capable of such a — you couldn't trust me —

Flora. It isn't *you* I couldn't trust. It's the

human nature *in* you that I had my doubts about. It's always so apt to get the better of people, and make them play tricks they'd never dream of by themselves.

Cedric [shocked but forgiving]. Fluff!

Flora [somewhat coldly]. I'm only being man to man.

Cedric. Look here, Flora, it's barely twelve hours since that vulgar idiot Klopstock shoved himself into our honeymoon. Barely twelve hours. We were in love with each other up till then, weren't we? [*Silence.*] Weren't we?

Flora [primly]. Yes.

Cedric. Very much? [*Silence.*] I say very much?

Flora [more primly]. Yes.

Cedric. Well, if you know as much about human nature as you make out, you know perfectly well that we must still be very much in love with each other. I mean *now, here!* Anyone might think, to hear some of the talk that went on last night, and even to see us at this moment, that we didn't care twopence for each other. But a passion won't be knocked on the head like that. You can't get over it — we're still damnably in love. We've had a row — good! It's been an infernal nuisance — good! I've been an ass, if you like — good! And what then? You're in love with a man who's been an ass — that's all. But you *are* in love with him. Moreover, he's ceased to be an

ass! . . . Now, Flora, one ass is enough. Are you going to listen to reason or not?

Flora. But your mother —

Cedric [*picking up a piece of crockery and dashing it violently to the ground; then, controlling himself, after a pause, in a low, tense voice*]. My mother be blowed! [*A pause. Mr. and Mrs. Reach Haslam appear at the house-door. They show surprise at the spectacle of Flora and Cedric with an appealing undecided gesture.*]

Flora [*advancing to meet Cedric*]. Cedric! [*Flora suddenly perceives Mr. and Mrs. Reach Haslam and completely changes her attitude, going towards them.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Really —

Flora [*lightly*]. So we've all got up with the sparrows!

Mr. R. Haslam. No. These two particular sparrows have just come out for a breath of air before retiring to their nest for the day. [*Yawns.*]

Mrs. R. Haslam. Work is work, young lady, and insists on being done [*with meaning*], whatever else happens or does not happen.

Flora. Ah! The birthrate article — has the poor thing been declining all this time?

Cedric [*anxious for his parents to depart*]. Mother, you ought to go to bed at once — you look absolutely exhausted.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Is it surprising? I was just

saying to your father that if this kind of thing was likely to occur often I should have to devise some way of procuring tea at sunrise.

Flora. But do you want some tea?

Mrs. R. Haslam. I never want what I can't have. I shall doubtless hold out till eight o'clock.

Cedric. Couldn't the dad make you some?

Mrs. R. Haslam. Impossible, child! At four o'clock in the morning!

Mr. R. Haslam. The cook always locks up the kitchen to keep Cuthbert and Fisher out.

Cedric. Seems odd that in a house like this you can't have a cup of tea whenever you happen to want it!

Mrs. R. Haslam [*coldly resenting this criticism of her housekeeping*]. Father, shall we go?

Flora. May I give you some tea?

Mrs. R. Haslam. It's very good of you to offer me tea in my own garden, but ——

Flora [*with great charm*]. Not at all. [*Opening her bag.*] I have my Thermos. I filled it yesterday before starting. You see, we had no programme, and I didn't know where we might ultimately be landed. Besides, I never travel without it. [*She unscrews the Thermos flask and pours out the steaming tea into the patent cover. Then undoes a little packet containing sugar.*] One lump, isn't it? [*Handing the cup, with a spoon, to Mrs. Reach Haslam, who accepts it.*] Sit down and drink it. I guessed about forty places where

I *might* pour that tea out — and they were all wrong! [*Mrs. Reach Haslam discovers that the tea is scalding.*] It is hot, isn't it?

Mrs. R. Haslam [*sipping*]. I'm afraid you didn't sleep very well, Flora.

Flora. Why?

Mrs. R. Haslam. You're down so exceedingly early.

Flora. The fact is, I could not get off to sleep.

Mr. R. Haslam [*half to himself*]. I put a complete set of my wife's novels in each of the spare bedrooms only yesterday. [*With a faint air of being puzzled.*]

Flora. Another cup?

Mrs. R. Haslam. No, thanks. Excellent.

Flora. I'm so glad I was here. You know, it's quite easy to have tea at any hour of the night. But of course, with all your other work, you can't be troubled with the little details of housekeeping.

Mrs. R. Haslam [*nettled*]. My *other* work! . . . No doubt when you're settled down with Cedric you will be able to show him what true housekeeping really is.

Flora. Settled down with Cedric!

Mrs. R. Haslam. My dear, I had intended to make no comment on the singular coincidence of you and Cedric being here in the garden at four in the morning. I did not mean to inquire into the significance of this broken crockery, nor of your attitude and tone to Cedric before you caught sight

of me. But I am a trained observer. You may remember that last night ——

Cedric. Mater, why don't you go to bed?

Mrs. R. Haslam. You may remember that last night I hinted that before very long you'd probably be throwing yourself into Cedric's arms [*benevolently*]. And I'm delighted to see that pride has not stood in your way. Delighted! How you got him down here into the garden I don't know, and it doesn't matter. [*Slight pause.*]

Flora [*to Cedric*]. Anything to say?

Cedric. You're quite wrong, mother. The fact is I've now come to the conclusion that Flora was perfectly right last night.

Mrs. R. Haslam. About what?

Cedric. In arguing that *nothing* ought to stand in the way of the honeymoon. And I've just been telling her so.

Flora. But he forgot to tell me that there is nothing now to stand in the way of the honeymoon.

Mrs. R. Haslam. What do you mean?

Flora. Klopstock has broken his leg and can't move for at least six weeks. [*Startled movement by Cedric. Quietly gracious, to Cedric.*] Didn't you know? [*Silence.*] Cedric, didn't you know?

Cedric [*with gruff reluctance*]. Yes . . . of course, Charlie gave me away?

Flora. Charlie merely told me, as he told you.

Mrs. R. Haslam. Everything is all right, then.

Flora. Do you think so? Cedric and I were supposed to be talking like honest Injuns ——

Mrs. R. Haslam. Honest Injuns?

Flora. Well, as man to man, then. Anyway, straight! And yet he positively assured me that nothing had happened, to influence him except my arguments. Whereas the fact was he knew that owing to this broken leg he could go away with a perfectly easy conscience. My arguments hadn't influenced him at all. His principles haven't really changed at all! But now he's safe as regards Klopstock he doesn't care a fig for his principles. His mind is free for pleasure, now — it wasn't before — and so in order to enjoy himself for a month he'd sacrifice *any* principles. Just like a man, that is! And there's something else. He was so desperately and madly anxious to have me that he told another simply appalling cold-blooded fib. He said he had sat up all through the night thinking over my arguments, without a wink of sleep. I suppose he thought that would touch me. Now the truth is that he slept very well, and woke up with such an appetite that he ate the whole of Charlie's supper except two bananas. I won't mention his references to his mother. But I think I've said enough to show that I didn't come down at four o'clock in the morning precisely in order to throw myself into your son's arms. Can you imagine a woman silly enough to marry a man who on the very day of the wedding would try to

deceive her as Cedric has tried to deceive me?

Mrs. R. Haslam [*majestic*]. Father! We had better go. [*She moves towards house. After reflection, savagely to Flora, over her shoulder.*] I rejoice that the breach is now definite. [*Exit into house. Cedric moodily goes up garden out of sight.*]

Mr. R. Haslam [*protesting*]. Hannah! [*Half to himself, looking at his watch*]. An inflammable hour — four o'clock!

Flora. We seem to be left alone together.

Mr. R. Haslam [*cheerfully*]. Yes, but I must go.

Flora. However do you manage to be always so calm and cheerful? I've noticed you in the most difficult situations —

Mr. R. Haslam. You have . . . You see I've my own private life to fall back on.

Flora [*interested*]. Have you? Where? I never —

Mr. R. Haslam [*tapping his forehead*]. Here!

Flora. I see.

Mr. R. Haslam. And my collection — that always keeps me amused.

Flora. Your collection?

Mr. R. Haslam. My collection of private opinions [*tapping his head*]. Here, too!

Mrs. H. Haslam [*off*]. Father!

Mr. R. Haslam [*with cheerful acquiescence*]. Yes, my dear. [*To Flora.*] Au revoir, I hope.

[*Exit into house. Vague noise of Cedric privately cursing behind, out of sight.*]

Flora [*going up a little*]. Cedric, when you've done swearing up there, I want to apologise to you. [*Re-enter Cedric. They look at each other.*]

Cedric. Apologise?

Flora. My human nature ran away with me. My human nature couldn't resist the temptation to fulfil your prayer. You demanded that your mother should be blown — and she has been. Unfortunately it meant you being blown, too. Now let's go.

Cedric. Go where?

Flora [*innocently*]. To Colchester, of course. Isn't there a newspaper train about a quarter past five?

Cedric [*shaking his head in a maze*]. I'm dashed if I know where I am —

Flora. I'm dashed if you are quite wide awake, my poor boy. Can't you see how amply you've proved that you look on marriage as seriously as any woman could desire — more seriously than any woman ought to desire. Last night you hesitated to sacrifice your aeroplane to me. But this morning you tell the most frightful lies on the chance of getting hold of me — although I gave you every encouragement to be truthful. You take the most frightful risks of being found out. You'll run any danger of trouble and unhappiness in the fu-

ture if only you can capture me now. You smash crockery. You behave meanly, *miserably*. You forfeit even your own self-respect. Cedric, that is what I like. It's just that that shows how much in earnest you are. Your deeds are far superior to your arguments. . . . Cedric ——

Cedric. What?

Flora. After all, your dear mother's prophecy was quite correct. I *was* just going to throw myself into your arms — but of course I couldn't do it while she was there, could I? [*Picks up Thermos cup, to screw it on to the flask, holding it at arm's length.*] Henceforth, sacred! [*Cedric roughly seizes her and kisses her. After freeing herself, as she puts the flask in the bag.*] It's a good thing I like them rough.

Cedric. What?

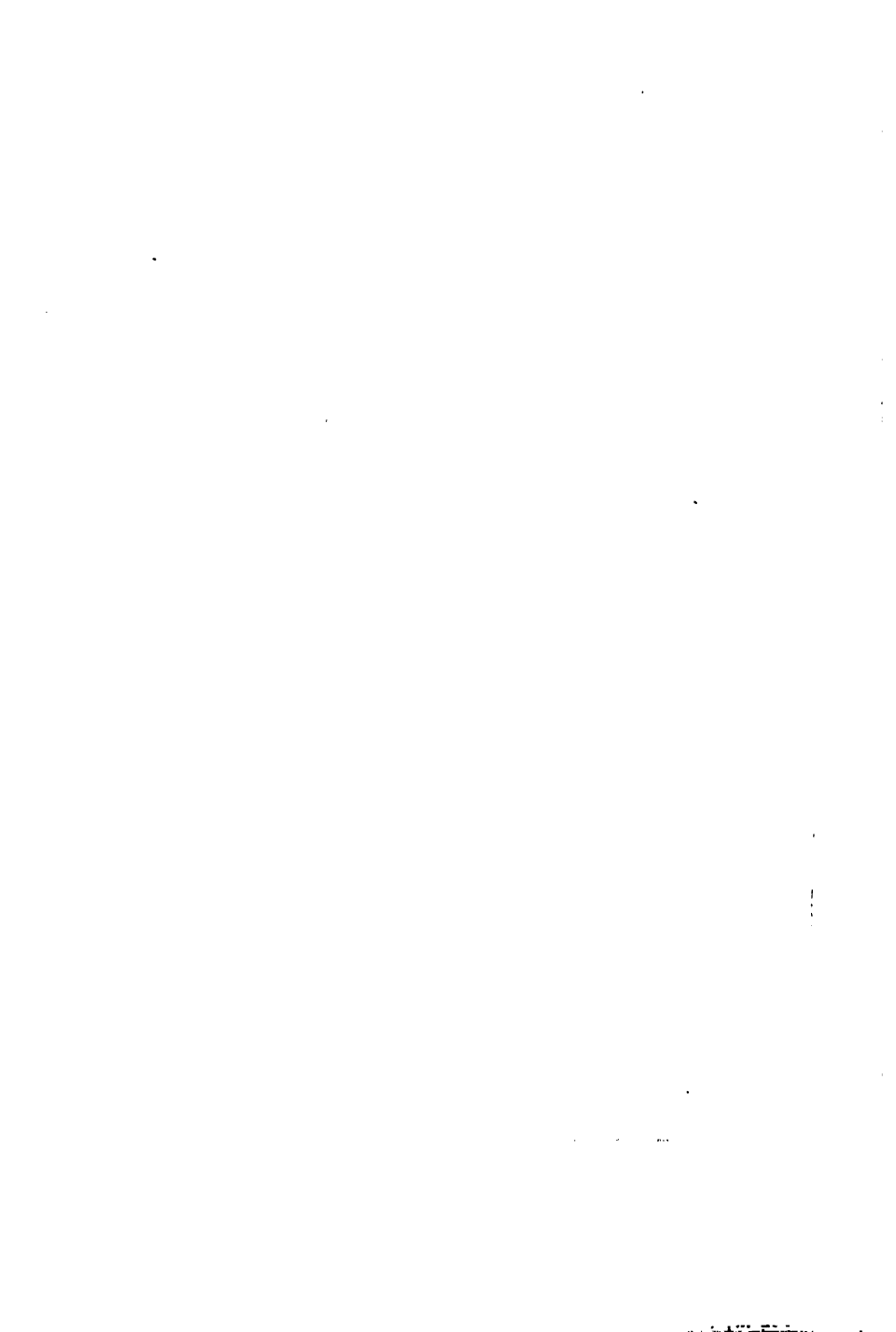
Flora. A man — and his chin.

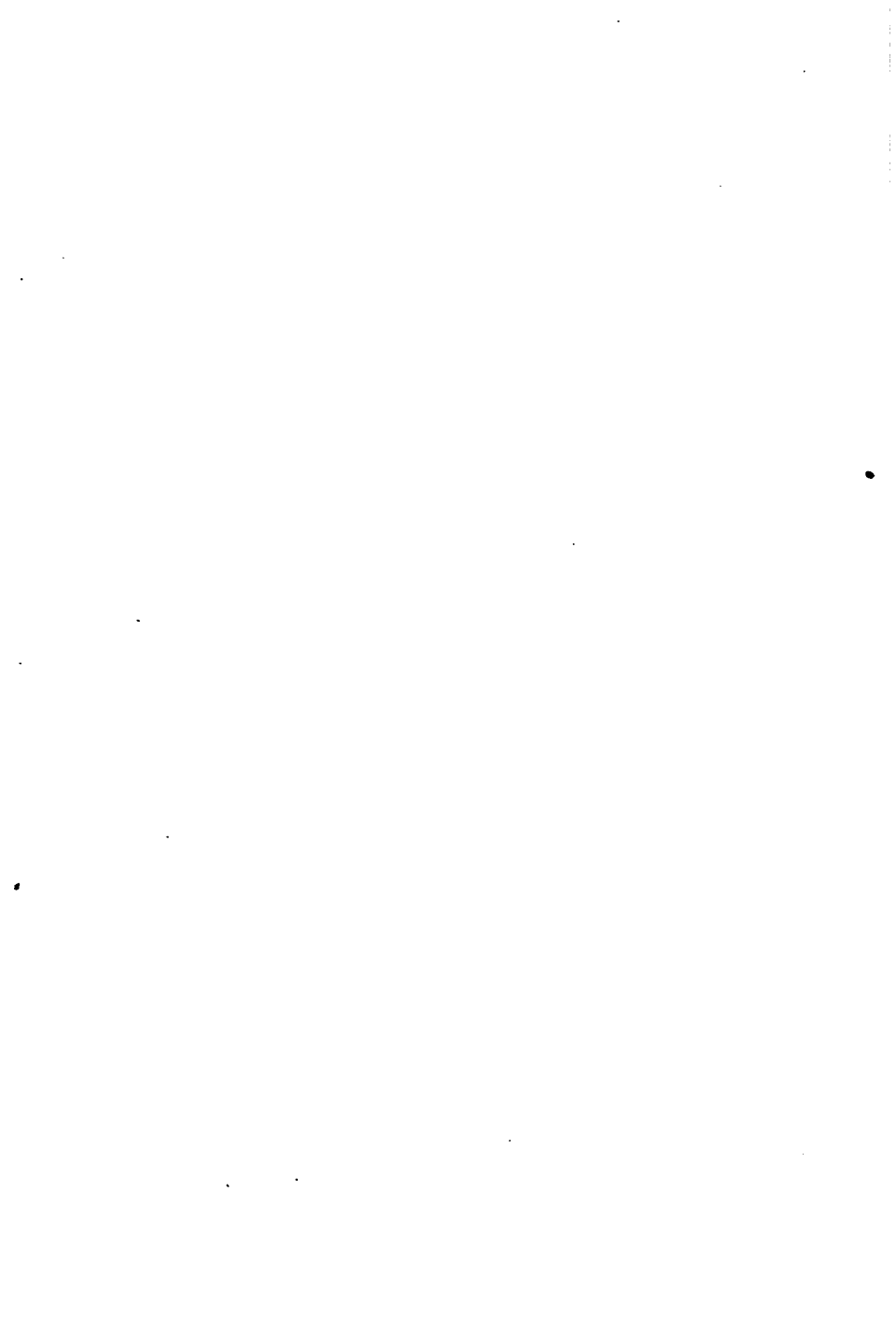
Cedric [*snatching at the bag and looking at his watch*]. Let's go out by the garden. . . . Probably find a cab. Motor would make too much noise, and rouse the mater. She'll never get over this.

Flora [*calmly*]. Oh, yes, she will. We all shall. [*Stops.*] But my trunks, and yours?

Cedric. I'll wire to Charlie from Liverpool Street to bring them down. . . . Confound him!

[*Curtain.*]





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